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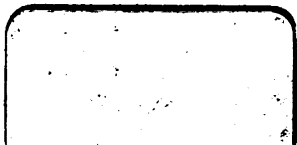




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SIX TO ONE; ¹³⁵⁶ 47

A NANTUCKET IDYL.

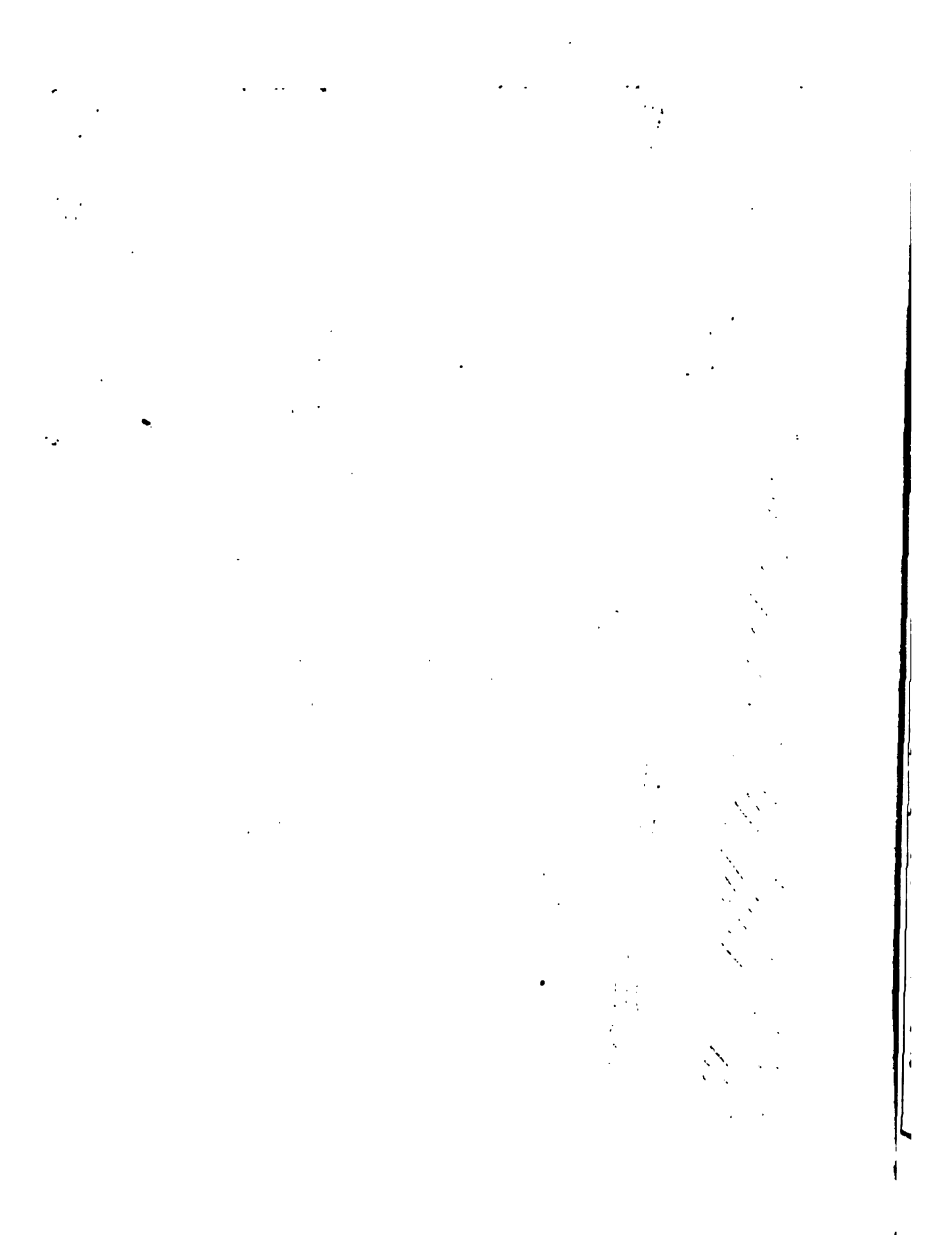
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SIX TO ONE;

A NANTUCKET IDYL

CHAPTER I.

THE ONE.

OPPPOSITE each other in the sanctum of Dr. Brainard, one of the most eminent of the younger physicians of New York City, sit the doctor himself, a man of thirty-five, and a younger man, of perhaps thirty. The doctor and Mr. Edgerton, his present caller, are close friends, whose intimacy dates from college days, and many is the hour of social relaxation they have passed together in each other's offices or at their common club. But the motive of this call is not social. Mr. Edgerton is consulting his friend professionally, concerning certain unpleasant symptoms that have been troubling him of late, symptoms the

doctor has long since noticed but has shut his eyes to from a strong repugnance to regarding his friend in anything like a professional light. But now he reproaches himself with not having spoken long ago.

Mr. Edgerton as he sits, appears to be of medium height and is of that brown-haired, grey-eyed type, as common in the temperate zone as the red color among horses. The face indicates an intellectual temperament, perhaps rather more receptive than self-asserting, but without any suggestion of softness. He would be called fine looking if the nervous wrinkles could be smoothed out of his cheeks and eyebrows, and the harassed expression banished from his face. He is just now dispirited and gloomy. It is noticeable that his fingers have a way of nervously twitching, and that he is constantly changing his position in the easy chair he occupies. His eyes moreover belie their natural calm and candor of expression by unsteady and shifting glances, and a restless motion. He is saying to the doctor,

“I don't know what's the matter at all, but

somehow I can't take any rest lately. I don't refer so much to sleeping, although I find that hard enough, as I've told you, but to the impossibility of lying off, of enjoying recreation and idleness, of taking a waking rest. Somehow my mind will not quit fretting over my work when I leave the office, as it used to. I find it next to impossible to relapse into a passive state, however tired I am, and I feel dreadfully tired all the while. But more excitement instead of less, is the only thing that rests me, and I know that must be wrong.

"And then the last half hour at the office is terribly long, terribly! longer than all the rest of the day. I have to use almost a literal spur to get through the last of my work. At times I come so squarely against a stump that it is a simple impossibility to write another line. My brain seems for the nonce as completely dead as a paralyzed arm, and I just have to go home, no matter what is pressing. That is one of the queerest sensations a man ever has, I fancy, and one of the most terrifying. The quality of my work too, falls off as

the difficulty of it increases. I cudgel my brains in vain, and have pretty much made up my mind that I've overrated myself and been overrated, and that I ought to resign my position.

"About the only sign of vigor I have left, if that be one, is a constant fretfulness and crossness. The least thing puts me into an uncontrollable rage. I am often utterly ashamed of myself at the way I abuse my subs, but I can't help it. What on earth has come over me, Harry? Is there any name for it?"

There are few more trying experiences in a doctor's life than when he is called on to make a serious diagnosis for a sick friend. His sympathies would fain becloud the fatal clearness of his perceptions. After a pause the doctor replied, affecting a cheery tone,

"Old boy, your case is perfectly clear. You have overworked yourself and must stop short off and take a long rest."

"Drop my profession? Leave my place?" asked Edgerton with a scared, appealing look which cut the doctor to the heart.

"Even so, Frank," he answered in a brave tone. "Not for long, perhaps, but the sooner the better. No doubt a little real rest will soon build you up again."

But Edgerton understood perfectly what he meant—that he was a broken-down man. He had dimly anticipated something of the sort for a good while, but still the doctor's announcement fell on him with a crushing suddenness. At the very threshold of his best decade he was laid on the shelf. His work was done. He was dead among the living. He might indeed ultimately recover so as to be able to do some light work in easy hours, but this possibility was a mere mockery. There was something humiliating and wounding, at once to his vanity, his pride of intellect and position, his ambitions, both moral and material, in this intimation that he had become a mental invalid.

As these reflections successively came over him he fell into a sinking revery, in which he felt himself dropping, dropping, from one plane of depression to another, from one step to the one below,

down, down, toward the bottom. He heard the doctor's voice a long way off, saying something like,

"Don't take it so hard, Frank; scores of men have come to me far worse off than you are, and some of them are as well to-day as any in the city. Cheer up, old fellow, your case is not a bad one."

"I thank God I'm not married," said Edgerton. "How could I bear to go home and tell my wife that I was a broken-down man?"

"Who said you were any such thing? I didn't," replied the doctor fiercely. "Your nerves are in a jangle, that's all, and you've got to let up on the demnition grind of your newspaper work long enough for a six months' summer vacation, beginning to-morrow; not a day later."

"To-morrow! It's impossible!" cried Edgerton, with a despairing sort of vehemence.

"Have I got to scare you some more!" asked the doctor. "Your case is not so bad but that I'm sure I can cure you, but every day you stick at work means a month longer to get well in and less chance of a cure at that. An immediate and long

vacation is absolutely imperative. You must go away from the city to some place, if possible, out of reach of newspapers, telegraphs, and railroads. Climate doesn't much matter with you."

"There's no such place nowadays," said Edgerton. "I fancy you had better send me to an asylum for imbeciles and feeble-minded and have done with it."

"Time enough for that later," replied the doctor cheerily. "How would you like a few months at Nantucket to begin with? I was down there last summer and I don't believe there is a more out-of-the-way, switched off sort of place in the United States."

"What!" exclaimed the other, fairly shocked into a display of vivacity in spite of his depression. "That ridiculous little dead-alive down-east sand-bank, where there are six women to one man!"

"Isn't that enough for you? because if not I can reassure you," said the doctor smiling. "At this season the proportion is fifteen of the gentler to one of the sterner sex, a large part of the few men

being now absent on the mainland at their winter occupations."

"I shouldn't think of objecting to an excess of ladies' society," Edgerton replied, "but these Nantucket women, I suppose, are mostly fishwives and ancient virgins pickled in the east wind."

"The more I think of it," pursued the doctor, reflectively, "the more the place strikes me as an admirable selection. It is now April and for three months there will be no summer visitors to disturb you there. You've no idea how much you will enjoy studying the queer society and customs of the place. That will give you just about enough occupation."

"Good God! Harry, you must be crazy! You can't think that a man who has lived for ten years in a newspaper office, transmitting the sensations of a world through his nerves every day, could stand being exiled to such a comatose community as Nantucket! I should go mad in a week!"

"Perhaps you will fret some at first, just as the drunkard does when he forswears vinous ex-

citement for the monotony of a temperate life, but you have got to reconcile yourself to a diet of quiet or you will never do six months more work," replied the doctor. "I don't say that Nantucket is your only possible sanitarium, mind you. Perhaps you may think of others as good, but to me it seems about the thing."

The doctor did not press the matter, but leading the conversation upon the topics of hygiene in general and Edgerton's case in particular, finally succeeded in getting his patient into quite a cheerful frame.

"It doesn't seem to me really as if I could quite go Nantucket," said the latter, voluntarily returning to the subject some time later, "and yet in one way it would be quite convenient. I have some sort of an uncle or aunt, I don't quite remember which, living down there, to say nothing of a pretty cousin who once spent a summer at our homestead in Woodstock. They've asked me to make them a visit, but though it's scarcely polite to say so, I don't think anything but this would

have ever led me to seriously consider their invitation."

The next day Edgerton went down to the evening newspaper office in which he held the position of managing editor, and had a long, and to him very trying, interview with the publishers. They were pained, surprised and entirely sympathetic when he told them the verdict of his doctor. Much against their will he insisted on making his resignation final, for thus alone, the doctor had advised him, could he secure himself the mental quiet and lack of pre-occupation essential to his cure. Later he bade his colaborers and subordinates in the office good-bye, and what hurt him most was the look of pity which he saw in their faces. He appreciated how bitter a thing pity is until the spirit is wholly broken.

He came in again after all had gone, to take a last farewell of the familiar apartments that had known him so many years. He sat long in his old arm chair and leaned his head upon the ink-stained desk. Dusk fell and the office boy came in whist-

ling to sweep out the room, but seeing the editor still there, hushed his piping and was about to retire. To his humble eye Edgerton had always been a sort of Jupiter Tonans, and little did he dream that the editor at that moment envied the office boy. But so it was. To Edgerton the lad seemed, by his connection with the working world, to stand above him, and he experienced a sense of moral inferiority in his presence. He said in a humble tone,

“You needn’t go, Johnnie. Sweep away. Never mind me.”

The day had been a bitter experience for him, but he already felt the better for it. He was much calmer, and that night, the first for many a week, he slept as soundly as a child. The next day he kept away from the office, wandering about the city and trying vainly to interest himself in doing nothing. Such a holiday would have been all too short had he been at work, but now the mere fact that he was no longer a worker made it insufferably long and wearisome. He somehow

could not recall a single one of the hundred delightful recreations and excursions which, while still a slave to the desk, he had pictured to himself as charming uses of leisure. And at evening, as the newsboys began to cry his paper on the street, the sound made him so sick at heart and miserable, that he was fain to lock himself in his room and shut the windows close.

The next afternoon and the next, obeying a gravitation he could not resist, he began to haunt the newspaper offices again, and to wander about them after office hours, like an uneasy ghost revisiting the scenes of its passion, and such indeed he seemed to himself. He took pains to avoid meeting the men on these visits, but his habits became known to them, and it was the talk in the office that poor Edgerton had become a mere wreck.

The doctor got wind of the way matters were going, and meeting Edgerton one day, took him to task, and the big whiskered man confessed with weak tears in his eyes how wretched he was, and

how hard he found it to tear himself away from his old life.

"I sympathize with ghosts," he said.

"This will never do in the world, never, sir. Do you want to spoil my credit as a doctor? If you do I don't propose to let you," cried the other, with great show of indignation. "You must leave the city this very day if I have to carry you out on my back."

And the energetic doctor took him to his lodgings, packed his trunks, settled with his landlady, locked up his closets, took him to the cars, got his ticket and saw him off for Woodstock, having exacted a solemn promise that in a week, at farthest he would go to Nantucket.

CHAPTER II.

THE SIX.

IT so happened that several days after the sudden departure of Mr. Edgerton from New York, Miss Belle Macy, of — street, Nantucket, had a little tea party.

Mary Veeder, Kate Mayhew, Anna Coffin, Lizzie Folger, and Addie Follet were present.

"I asked Mr. Starbuck," Belle explained to the girls, "but his crutch is being mended and he couldn't come. There was Mr. Barnard still, but he is rather old, you know, and a widower besides, and so I thought you would rather have just us girls."

"It seems to have been a Hobson's choice," remarked Anna Coffin, a pale, sharp-featured maiden with a sallow complexion. "I daresay we shall

get along very well without any gentlemen. If we don't it won't be for want of practice anyhow."

"It is so odd that we should miss men so much when they are such common coarse things. It is just as if we had all the luxuries of the table and no potatoes," remarked Lizzie Folger in her honest matter of fact way.

"I'm really sorry for you pretty girls," said Anna Coffin. "Without mankind, you are like a lot of pretty worsteds with no canvas to work figures on. You'd much better have all been homely like me. Homeliness makes my face ache sometimes, but pretty faces with their constant ache to be seen and appreciated, in the long run, give more pain to their wearers than homely ones, I'll warrant."

"Now who'd suppose," exclaimed Kate Mayhew, a tall spirited brunette, "judging from the unworldly tone of Anna's conversation, that she was the only girl in the company who has actually captured a man and got him in engagement shackles. She's always saying that she isn't pretty, and perhaps she isn't in the honest, fair, square

and aboveboard way May and Liz are, but she's got sly underhanded ways of being charming which are ten times as dangerous as any of our faces."

"I've always wondered that the Catholics, who have generally so sharp an eye for church prospects, don't set up a nunnery here," observed Belle. "We island girls might as well be nuns in name as in fact, and make a virtue of necessity."

"I'm in favor of bolder counsels," said Kate, who was fond of rather shocking the others. "Let us raise a crew of island girls, man a schooner and go for a kidnapping cruise along the coast, picking up nice young men. They say there are some sweet things along shore, from New Bedford to New York. It would be a sort of historical revenge for the rape of the Sabine women."

"Aren't you ashamed, girls," said Belle Macy, laughing. "I'm so thankful there is no danger of any man overhearing us. We should frighten him away by the next boat, and then those horrid papers on the coast would be poking more fun because another man had gone off."

"See how we've shocked Addie with our talk," said Anna. "We ought not to be filling her young head with notions. Remember Addie, that men are toys for grown-up women to play with. Little girls like you have nothing to do with such things."

The calm-eyed maiden addressed in this condescending tone would certainly not have been considered a little girl anywhere else, but on the island girls are kept back, as there is nothing to be gained by putting them forward; and as Addie was by several years the youngest of the party, the others adopted a quite motherly tone toward her.

"O, I wasn't shocked," she replied in a low, musical, effortless tone. "I was thinking though that instead of kidnapping more men, it would be much more romantic and nicer every way, to send away the few we have left and set up as an Amazon republic."

"A promising lot of Amazons you are, to sit here gossiping a whole evening about men," said Mary Veeder, a placid blonde. "One would think we had met in convention to consider the un-

manned state of the island, and I'm sure I didn't come for that. I'll take another cup of tea, Belle. Do let's be sensible girls."

"They shall be, May, bless your serious old heart," replied Belle Macy, "in just a minute. I only want to tell them something first. A young man, ever so nice, is coming to our house from New York for a long visit. And I'm going to be generous and divide him up among you all, which is a good deal more than you did, you sly Anna Coffin, when that young gentleman came to see you last summer."

"Yes, indeed it is," cried the other girls merrily, while Anna smiled complacently.

"What makes you so generous?" she asked Belle. "Does he squint, or have red hair, or what is the matter with him?"

"Oh, what a girl to impute motives!" replied Belle. "You'll be ashamed enough of saying that when you see him. He is tall and handsome, with a ravishing moustache. Squint indeed! He has splendid eyes."

"What color?" asked Liz.

"Oh I forget; blue, I fancy."

"What on earth makes him come here?" asked Kate, with a bewildered contraction of her thick eyebrows.

"He is sick."

"Oh!" chorussed the girls with an accent of disappointment. Anna Coffin asked,

"The interesting invalid style, or the other sort?"

"The interesting," replied Belle. "Brain exhaustion, nervous prostration, result of overwork as editor of a New York paper; so his mother writes mine. He's my cousin, you see."

The girls were somewhat impressed by the mention of diseases that were unknown on the island.

"Can he walk about?" asked Liz, with awe.

"I suppose so, or they would have said something about it in the letter," Belle thought.

"Is it something the matter with his mind?" inquired Mary Veeder.

"I presume so, but I don't think it can be very bad or they wouldn't let him come alone," Belle said.

"You haven't told us whether he is married or not," remarked Liz.

"Of course he isn't. You don't suppose I would jest so cruelly with your feelings as that."

"Did you ever see him? Come, tell us about him," said Anna.

"I saw him a few days that summer I spent at Woodstock. The most I remember is that he is a good height, has rather a full face, and wears his whiskers so as to leave his chin bare, and he has smiling eyes. He talks a good deal and some of his talk sounds as if he wrote poetry. I went out to two or three parties with him when I was at Woodstock, and it was clear that he was a favorite among the girls, and that speaks well for him."

"I'm sure I don't think so," said Anna. "Women are about as good judges of men's real characters as—well, as men are of women's, and they couldn't be worse."

"Well anyhow," persisted Belle, "the fact that the Woodstock girls liked him shows that we shall, for girls are awfully alike. And now let's not talk about him any more or you will be looking foolish when you meet him."

The rest of the evening passed in conversation on women's topics, which in Nantucket are worn more threadbare than anywhere else in the world outside a convent. Recent and prospective church festivals and sociables, parties and sewing bees, the new way of dressing the hair, the merits of Miss Smith as a dressmaker, and the coming lecturer from Boston, were successively debated. A peculiarity that would have struck an observer was that men's names occurred less often than is usual in social gossip, there being almost no references to flirtations, engagements or marriages. Another noticeable thing was an air of comradeship and candor in the manner in which girls not present were alluded to, that is not observable in some feminine circles, and which perhaps a philosopher would have ascribed to the lack on the island

of men, those apples of discord among women.
As the party broke up, Belle said,

“There’s one thing understood, girls, and that is that Mr. Edgerton, when he comes, is to be common property, and his society is to be enjoyed on communistic principles. There’s going to be no nonsense about it; no abetting by any of you of any attempts at a private flirtation which he may make; men are so absurd. All the girls who promise this hold up their hands, and I won’t introduce him to those who don’t.”

They all laughingly held up their hands.

CHAPTER III.

SIX TO ONE.

THE attention of the reader is at this point invited to some extracts from a letter written from Nantucket by Mr. Frank Edgerton to Dr. Brainard, some fortnight or so after the former's arrival at the island.

“If you were not a married man, and chained besides to the galley oar by the exigencies of the most exacting of professions—except journalism,—I should not dare to describe to you the felicity of my present situation, and do not do so as it is, save under the most solemn charges of secrecy. I've never envied the Grand Turk his seraglio; who wants a hogshead of molasses? But of the ethereal bouquet of maidenhood, the perfume of pure girlish natures, who ever had enough! To be the only man in a circle of half a dozen girls, to breathe as if it were common air, the fragrance of their pres-

ence, to enjoy their glances like common light, such is the earthly paradise of your grateful patient. Did I ignorantly say that Nantucket is swept by bleak salt winds ? it is bathed in an atmosphere of attar of roses. No age but must glow again, no infirmity but must shortly be rehabilitated in such an air. In this reservoir of femininity, I believe I have found the fountain of youth. I am already quite rejuvenated. If restored health were my sole thought I ought to return to-day, but I know not if ever I shall return again to the rude, coarse, masculine society of the mainland, for which I become daily more unfitted."

Further on in this epistle the writer grows more sedate. He says :

"My cousin Belle Macy is a very nice girl indeed. She not only makes my aunt's house sunshiny, but has introduced me to a circle of her girl friends, all charming and different as can be. Already I have attended several little gatherings, at which I have been the only gentleman present, except a bashful half-grown boy or two, and an

elderly gentleman, invited evidently to keep me in countenance. The girls apparently feared I might find it odd to be alone among them, but I took to the novel situation so kindly that they were probably reassured, for of late the elderly gentleman and the boys have not been present. We call our clique the Rainbow, otherwise the Prism, the seven of us standing for the seven prismatic hues. Pretty idea, isn't it? It was Addie Follet's suggestion, and just like her. She is a pale grey-eyed girl, with just as much beauty, I fancy, in her face as you have the eyes to see into. Some wouldn't see any; I've just begun. Prettier girls than they almost all are, are not often seen. The east wind stole for their cheeks the bloom of England's rosebud garden of girls, and they have the health of all island peoples. I shouldn't write so rhapsodically, but you see when I'm with the girls I get choked up with soft things to say which I dare not utter, and therefore seek relief in forwarding them to you. Perhaps you can work them over for domestic use. Compliments needn't

be nice fits, though to be sure any pretty thing will fit Miss Brainard. But I say again, as you love me, don't tell any of the fellows what I've found. To be sure you might say there was enough for more than one, but that fellow who said enough was as good as a feast had never visited Nantucket."

Edgerton had certainly made excellent progress in the good graces of the girls. They found him good-looking, very entertaining and very appreciative of their society. He talked a good deal, as Belle had warned them, but they liked prodigiously the eager earnest way in which he addressed himself to their minds instead of to their faces, especially as it was evident he didn't overlook the latter.

Without being at all of a gallant, he had a genuine fondness for ladies' society, and his evident sense of pleasure in it went further to commend him to their good graces than would any amount of officious services. He was by temperament very susceptible to poetic and sentimental suggestions,

and obliged as he had been in his business life entirely to neglect this side of his disposition, the exclusive society of these young ladies created an intellectual atmosphere delightfully genial and stimulating; for while men don't like sentiment unless they fully understand it, and not always then, women always enjoy it whether they understand it or not. Their sympathy outruns their comprehension in this respect, while that of men lags behind theirs.

A week or two of sailing had wonderfully toned up Edgerton's appearance, put a spring in his step, brought back the old gay light to his eyes, smoothed the wrinkles out of his cheeks and brows, and bronzed his face to a tint harmonious with the tawny beard.

The sensitive temperament that had made him an easy prey to the fret of business, now brought him at once under the influence of the rest and vitality of the sea. Floating idly in his boat day after day, he rested his tired eyes on boundlessness. His sense of sight had a sensation of intoxication every time he freshly scanned the

limitless prospect of the undulating waters. His eyes felt as his muscles would, were the attraction of gravitation suddenly annulled and the body made weightless. Limitation is to the eye what gravitation is to the muscles. He seemed resting on the heaving bosom of infinity and from the contact he drew a sense of moral, mental, and physical health and balance, such as he had never known before. The sea cure was what he needed. For a brain wearied by the attrition of petty things and the harassment of details, this prescription of infinity-illusion is the specific.

One warm evening toward the end of April the Prism met at Mary Veeder's. When Belle and Edgerton reached the house, although they were late, they found no one in the unlighted parlors, which seemed the more unaccountable as Edgerton was sure he had heard the sound of voices and laughter as they approached the door.

"They're on the walk. Go right up," said an elderly lady putting her head out of the sitting-room door on the other side the hall.

"Come on, Frank," said Belle, tripping up the staircase.

"Where are you going?" he asked in bewilderment. "She said out on the walk."

"Of course she did. Come on, what are you waiting for?" Edgerton began to have fears for Belle's sanity.

"The walk is out doors not upstairs, I take it," he said, with mild confidence in the strength of his position. She stared down at him a moment and then burst out laughing.

"Oh I forgot that you are a poor innocent continental and haven't found out that our walks are heavenward in Nantucket. Come along and I'll show you something." He did so, stumbling after her as she lightly tripped through the hall and garret and up more staircases, with a vague impression on his mind that he was being made the victim of some practical joke. Suddenly he emerged upon a large balustraded platform perched on the peak of the roof, and found himself in the midst of a merry party of girls. Chairs, and a table with refreshments

stood about, with rugs and cushions for the indolent, making the illusion complete of an oriental house-top scene. Edgerton's ignorance as to the meaning of a "walk" in Nantucket struck the girls as extremely funny, and it was forthwith explained to him that past generations of retired sea captains had built these platforms or walks for the sake of commanding a sea view and preserving the illusion of their familiar quarter decks.

"We have mostly torn them down of late years," said Kate Mayhew. "We don't love the sea as they did, for all it means to us is isolation from civilization."

"Kate hates it and never misses a chance for a spiteful sling," said Anna, "but I think we island folks are mostly rather fond of our prison wall. Addie even has a misty theory about the ocean being Nantucket's wedding ring and making us girls brides of the sea, a new order of nuns, you observe. But most of us can't quite get that far."

"Oh, let's talk about the land, that God made because He was tired of the sea," said Kate. "Do

tell us some more about New York, Mr. Edgerton. That's the sort of sea, a sea of men and women, that I should like to live beside."

And so Edgerton told them for an hour or so about the city and its life, being constantly surprised to see how the most trite and familiar facts and reflections on that subject impressed his listeners. It seemed to them a fairy tale. In the course of his talk he alluded to the Hudson, whereupon Addie Follet said,

"Do tell me, Mr. Edgerton, what a river is like."

"Yes, Frank, do tell her. She has never been off the island and never saw even a brook."

"Then you've never seen," said he, turning to Addie, "how land and water can set each other off, contribute to each other's beauty and harmonize in wedded effect. Here on the sea-shore the two are generally at war with brief and precarious truces. And—yes, if you were to see a river I think the utter silence of its motion would be the first thing to strike you, especially as you are so accustomed

to the uproar of the beach. You would be strangely moved, I'm sure, as you leaned your face so that your cheek nearly touched some great river's surface, and looking upward saw it come slipping toward you round a bend, resistless as ten thousand avalanches, yet sweeping on as softly, smoothly, silently, as a girl gliding on tip-toe, with her finger on her lip. How the voiceless beauty of some rivers haunts me now !”

“Then they can't seem alive,” said Addie disappointedly.

“Oh, indeed they do,” he replied. “When you are near them you feel the magnetism of a living presence, though so silent. The dweller on their banks has a sense of companionship. Why, when in travelling I pass a river, I always feel that I am suffering loss in leaving an acquaintance and possible friend behind, and I carry with me always a vague remembrance of its personality.

“There can be no general definition of a river, because each one has such a distinct personality of its own, and especially the little river, not more

than a stone's throw across. Such small streams are full of a sweet racy individuality, and they are not so large that one is awed by them. They are small enough to know thoroughly.

But I'm romancing. You must excuse me. It isn't often that one has a chance to tell what a river is."

"Oh, do go on," cried the girls, nor was he hard to persuade, for the opportunity of airing a pet enthusiasm of his before listeners, in whom sight had not limited the creative potency of the imagination, was too enticing.

"Which had you rather live beside," asked Lizzie Folger, "a river or the sea?"

"They're not the least alike," he replied. "The river is the more companionable and piquant. Its size doesn't make sympathy so difficult as it is with the ocean. The ocean is about as incomprehensible as the modern one God, but the rivers are more like the old demi-gods or lesser divinities, not without touches of humanity."

"I should like to be there when you get your

first sight of a river, Addie. You'll be dreadfully disappointed," said Lizzie Folger.

"I should like to be there too," said Edgerton. "Perhaps the river will yield to the magical insight of the first glance secrets of its meaning which my own perceptions, blunted by familiarity, only blunder at guessing."

"I will invite you all," said Addie, smiling. "but there is no hurry. I doubt if I ever get to rivers. The sea will last my lifetime. When I have understood that it will be time enough to try something else."

"Why Addie," said Belle, "you are like the rustic who thought he had got to eat the whole of every dish on the bill of fare before he could taste the next."

"Am I so bad as that?" asked Addie, seriously.

"No, Belle," said Edgerton, "she is rather like art-enthusiasts in a gallery of grand pictures who do not feel as if they could leave one masterpiece for another until they have mastered its meaning, even if they stand forever before it, and never see

a second picture. I don't suppose they would lose anything by that course, for the meaning of the whole universe is in every part of it; the answer to one of its problems, if it be the ultimate, answers all the rest; the key that unlocks one heaven unlocks all seven."

I should like to have seen the vision of a river, weird, majestic, mystical and vaguely personal, that floated through Addie Follet's dreams that night.

"When do the summer visitors begin to arrive?" inquired Edgerton.

"Not for a couple of months yet, I'm thankful to say," replied Anna.

"Why? don't you like them?"

"No, we don't any of us, except the hotel keepers and owners of fishing-boats," said she, decidedly. "We don't like to be regarded as curiosities, or have strangers come just to play for fun at a sort of life we live in sober earnest the year round. People don't like to have what is practical to them patronized as amusement by others. It cheapens it in their own eyes."

Mary, Addie, and Belle agreed with Anna. Liz rather liked the visitors; it relieved the monotony; while Kate said that the only reason she didn't was that it made her so envious when they sailed away home again.

"I do hope the island will never become popular as a pleasure resort," said Anna.

"It is in great danger," remarked Edgerton, "and so is every pretty or peculiar nook along the coast or in the mountains. The people over there on the mainland get so hungry for beauty in their nine months of toil and moil that they are on the look-out for every tid-bit of sea or landscape to devour in the vacation season, and they do devour it literally, spoiling and making an end of its charm by crowding to enjoy it, to say nothing of incidentally demoralizing the inhabitants by turning them into a crowd of lackeys and swindlers. If a tourist finds a particularly charming spot in his rambles, unless he has a special grudge against it, you would suppose he'd have sense enough to keep it a religious secret. But the fool generally goes blabbing.

It's odd how tastes differ. Now I'd as soon think of advertising the attractions of my sweetheart and getting up popular excursions at cheap rates to make the public acquainted with her."

As they talked the moon rose toward her middle course, flooding with light the sleepy town, the shining bay and the group on the housetop, shadowing the eyes of the girls with a duskier light and lending their forms an ideal grace.

"Oh, by the way," said Edgerton, "Won't some of you please give me a name for my new cat-rigged sailboat? I have hired it for the season and as you will all have to ride in it a good deal, you had best select a good name."

"Naming boats is the special province of sentimental people," said Anna, "and I beg off. Ask Addie. Boats are her particular department."

"Why not call it '*The Dream*?' " said that young lady.

"What's the significance?" asked Belle.

"Oh, because a boat sails away from shore as we drift out when we sleep." The idea pleased

them all and it was decided to christen the boat accordingly.

On Belle's finally announcing that she must take her invalid cousin home, the party broke up. Edgerton insisted on escorting all the girls to their residences, so with one on each arm, and the other three behind, the merry party set out.

He sat long in his room that night tingling in every nerve with the delightful exhilaration of the evening.

"There's no use talking," he finally muttered to himself, "women are like galvanic batteries; the greater the number of cups the greater the force of the current. I never appreciated before how the womanly afflatus increases in intensity with the number of women."

In a letter to Dr. Brainard the next day he pursues the same train of thought, and on that account I insert several extracts.

"Isn't it true," he says, "that while the ideal marriage is that between one man and one woman, a man needs attrition with a number of feminine

minds to develop his full responsiveness to feminine influence? Monogamy may be the true law of marriage, but, as I take it, polygamy and polyandry is the sexual law of the intellect, for it strikes me that there is a marriage intellectual as well as physical, complex and social as well as dual and domestic. The lines of these different species of sexual union may not necessarily coincide, but I am at a loss to see why unions of the one sort, although so entirely spiritual, are not as real as those of the other, and often, no doubt, in a much higher sense complete. Matrimony is by no means the only web in which the souls of men and women are woven together. If there strike you any oddity in this sort of talk, just remember that it is the suggestion of my strange and delightful relations with the charming circle of girls here. My imagination is kept constantly busy seeking for those relations new expressions, and poetical interpretations.

“Of course you will understand that there are no incipient love affairs in this case. Whatever feeling it is that a man entertains equally toward

half a dozen girls, it certainly is not love. I shouldn't be human if I hadn't tried a little flirtation at first, but somehow there didn't seem to be any response, and since, I have stayed where the girls have put me, and on the whole I like it best so. We all know what it is to touch hearts with women, but to touch minds is, I am sure, an even finer thrill, a subtler, more spiritual pleasure, which has no reaction. I never enjoyed my mind so much as now. Between us, I never felt so bright as when with these girls. I am constantly being as surprised at the clever ideas I find in my mind, as a man is who discovers unsuspected five-dollar bills in his vest pocket. Whether it is that the ideas are really unusually good or that the magical medium of feminine sympathy transfigures common things, I can't say. [Would I could bottle some of this wonder working feminine effluence! With a vial thereof in my desk at the office I should never have flatted out as I did.]

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"That brings me back to business thoughts. I am thankful that you persuaded me to resign my

place for good, for I should otherwise deem it my clear duty to return forthwith. As it is I feel less like it, with every new access of health. Why, bless you, if I hadn't shaken off my business I should have entirely forgotten that (one's mind may be a source of enjoyment to oneself.) I was fast coming to regard it merely as a tool to make a living with. The world is larger, the meanings of life and the modes of life more various, than I imagined while stuck in my rut there in the office. It seemed then as if there was but just that one point by which I could grip on to the world and keep in connection with it. But now I find that I died out of a narrow treadmill existence, habit bound and routine, to be born again into the world with a youth's sense of the rich and boundless opportunities of life. I believe already, on the strength of my own experience, in the American practice of changing one's profession half a dozen times in a lifetime. (Our minds do so soon become habit-bound as the result of the establishment of permanent relations!) And if to be habit-

bound is our fate and normal state, let us at least, like other crustaceans, change our shells periodically. The willing, choosing, initiating faculties, the exercise of which is the real joy of life, are so prompt to abdicate in favor of habit, that we can only maintain a vigorous vitality as we keep moving and challenging new emergencies. I write you long letters because that is all I do. I'm just enjoying myself, and, old boy, there is a mighty deal in one's self to enjoy, if you once get the hang of how to do it."

CHAPTER IV.

YELLOW.

ONE thing Edgerton had rather wondered at. Although he was now upon terms of considerable intimacy with the girls and had passed a dozen evenings in their society, no one of them had as yet ever asked him, even in the most general sort of way, to call upon her, and this too in spite of some rather plain hints on his part of a willingness to be asked.

He missed this because he began to want to see them separately, at least some of them. It was only of late that he had experienced this desire, having at first been perfectly satisfied with their general effect, set, as it were, in a cluster. The six girls had so long been intimate that their characters had to an unusual extent come to adapt themselves to one another, so that each one set the others off and was herself complementary to the general effect. Edgerton felt that, as regarded

most of the girls, this joint effect was likely to be the most satisfactory, and that if seen apart they might appear to less advantage. But in regard to one or two he did not have this feeling.

One afternoon being alone with Belle in the sitting room, he took an opportunity of hinting in a matter of course way, that he thought of making a call or two on the members of the Prism. She looked up quickly from her sewing, and asked with evident curiosity,

“Who has asked you to call?”

“Why none of them have exactly asked me,” he replied, “but I fancied that, seeing we are getting well acquainted, it would not be rude to make a call or two of my own motion.”

“Whom were you going to call on, if you don't mind telling?”

He would not have minded, but he thought he detected an accent of special interest in his cousin's tone of affected indifference, and so replied in non-committal fashion. She glanced at him with an amused little look in her blue eyes and said,

"Well, Frank, I'm glad you told me, for you see Island etiquette is rather peculiar in some respects, and I think I wouldn't hurry about calling. I supposed that what with our little meetings every day or two, you saw enough of them."

He felt like telling her that a *tete-à-tete* with a lady, and a conversation with several ladies, are as different as a sonata and a *pot-pourri*, but he merely replied,

"Well, I suppose you know best, coz, and I'm much obliged for the hint."

Pretty soon Belle put on her hat and ran over to Kate Mayhew's, whom she found with the sleeves rolled up on her plump arms, making biscuits for tea. She and Belle were special friends, and Belle never thought that she fairly knew anything until Kate knew it too.

"Tell me what you are laughing at, directly," the latter demanded, as Belle stood in the pantry door, her face rippling over with fun.

"My handsome cousin is getting unmanageable."

Kate's black eyes were brightest when her cheeks had color in them. "What do you mean?" with more interest if less incisiveness in her voice.

"Why, don't you think he started up all on a sudden this afternoon and said he was going around calling on some of you, and I had to tell a big parable about its not being island fashions to make calls, in order to stop him. At first I was afraid some of the girls had broken their promises by asking him to call, but he said not. He was just going to do it out of whole cloth. Showed he wanted to seriously, eh, Kate?"

"Whom was he going to call on?" inquired Kate, flicking away a piece of dough with her finger and following it with her eyes as if quite absorbed in its fate.

"I tried to get him to tell, but he wouldn't allow that he had any special intentions, though of course he must have had."

"Yes, he must have had," Kate assented looking around for another piece of dough to send after the first.

"I don't think it can be anything serious," said Belle, "but we must be on the lookout. He is going to stay all summer and we can get lots of fun out of him if we can prevent his being foolish. You haven't noticed anything have you? Mary Veeder is very pretty, and she's always looking at him while he talks, which you know is most of the time. Too much blue eyes, or black ones either, aren't good for any man."

"He doesn't care for her, I'll warrant," said Kate, with positiveness. "I mean not in *that* way," quite making the harmless little word blush by the significant stress she laid on it.

"Well, who can it be then?" pursued Belle. "Not Anna, for he knows she is engaged; Addio is a mere child; and Liz—oh, I know it isn't Liz. Why Kate, it isn't you, is it?"

With a curious mixture of surprise, consternation, and disgust, Kate felt that her cheeks were beginning to burn. Her indignation at such false witnesses only increased the insulting glow, and well she knew that Belle's sharp eyes would never

miss the signal. In her strait an inspiration came to her. Her hands were covered with flour, and instantly clapping them upon her cheeks she left a covering that quite disguised their rosiness, exclaiming as she did so,

“Nonsense, Belle! By the way, did you know how good flour is for the complexion. I always daub my cheeks when I make biscuits.”

The recording angel doubtless blots out fibs told for modesty's sake, of which the number is legion.

“If it would give me your complexion I wouldn't mind using a barrel a week. Anna Coffin would need two,” said Belle innocently. “But good-bye, it is time I were making biscuits myself for his lordship's supper.”

“By the way, Belle,” said Kate, as her friend turned away, “I thought you could be depended on to keep Mr. Edgerton at home.”

She said this with a particular significance which Belle answered with an entirely natural laugh.

"Pshaw, Kate! He's my brother so far as that sort of thing is concerned," and with that she ran off.

Kate did not speak to any one about Edgerton's new departure, but Belle acquainted all the girls with it and warned them to be on their guard.

The only one who felt quite sure that it was not herself on whom Edgerton had intended calling, was Addie Follet. This was partly because she was the youngest, and had been in the habit of being regarded and of regarding herself as a child compared with the others, but mostly because her entire habit of mind and tone of sentiment were peculiarly calculated to exclude the ideas of the other sex and of flirtations which most girls of her age are sufficiently inclined to.

On her father's side she was descended from a race of sea captains. He had fallen in love with her mother while she was a passenger on his ship going to Italy for the purpose of art study. Both her parents had died almost before Addie could remember,

and she had always lived with an uncle in a house on the windy bluff overlooking the sound outside the harbor. Her uncle being childless and living somewhat out of the town, she had grown up seeing little of other children. The beach had been her playground since she was a baby, and the waves almost her only playmates. As she grew up the development of strong æsthetic feelings, her mother's legacy, had given this childish devotion to the sea new and deeper interpretations.

Later on the vague aspirations and longings of opening womanhood came, and in her almost conventual seclusion, they not unnaturally found play in heightening her previous admiration and awe of the ocean into something like a mystical passion. Up to the time of which I write this nun of the sea had not been conscious of any inclination even toward that ideal man who is the first lover of every woman, and without whose predisposing influence no subsequent lover would have any chance. For every feeling that stirred within her she found

an easy translation into some new form of sympathy with the sea, some new mood of absorption in it. She would have laughed at the suggestion that a human being could call forth the exalted and intense emotions which the sea elicited and satisfied.

I have called her a "nun of the sea," and there was something of that in her feeling. Although there could be nothing more spontaneous than her passion for the ocean, at the same time her feminine instinct was pleased with a more or less vague idea of renunciation and of self devotion for its sake.

It was now June, and the season for sailing parties having opened, *The Dream* was in requisition nearly every warm day to take out the Prism. Edgerton was a very fair amateur navigator, and had been out with the fishermen often enough to learn the coast and the currents. One reason he enjoyed these sailing parties so much was the excuse they gave him to withdraw his six sweet-hearts completely from all contact with the rest of

the world, isolating them with himself upon the sea. He had written to Dr. Brainard :

"It is the absurdest thing what a sense of proprietorship I begin to feel in these girls. I never before understood how a man could be jealous for half a dozen at a time, and consequently never did justice to the feelings of the Moslem husband."

He called them his crew, and each had her special seat in the boat. On his right and left as he sat at the tiller, Kate and Addie had their places, and sitting between them, the others in front of him, his eyes full of pretty faces, the boat careering before a fresh breeze, and yet obedient to the lightest touch on the tiller, he would not have changed places with a sultan. He was enthusiastically fond of sailing. It combined, he maintained, the special zests of swimming, skating, horseback-riding, driving, and flying itself.

The girls liked sailing well enough, though with all of them but Addie familiarity had rather blunted their enthusiasm. But in her Edgerton found entire sympathy with his exuberance. Often he for-

her rosy cheeks and auburn hair. Addie was given green as the proper hue for a sea-nymph, which left orange for Edgerton. The girls limited their display of colors to scarfs, feathers and ribbons, but the effect was very pretty and variegated.

It was thus by her yellow colors that Edgerton recognized Kate, and thereupon quickened his pace, to overtake her. If he couldn't call on these young ladies, he could at least exchange courtesies on the street. As he approached, she seemed at the sound of his steps to quicken her own, but he soon overtook her and hat in hand wished her good evening. He was not looking to see any special expression in her face or he would have seen embarrassment mingled with pleasure.

"After all," she was saying to herself, "I am not to blame, Belle herself couldn't say so; I can't send him away. One must be civil."

He was in high spirits and talked so fast that she had little need to say much. It was the first opportunity he had enjoyed for a tete-a-tete with a young lady for a month, except of course with

Belle, and she didn't count with him any more than he with her. The very fact that he had enjoyed so much feminine society, of a general, as it were public sort, had rather stimulated than diminished his desire for the special, private kind he had now secured.

"It seems to me," he was saying, "that if any climate can encourage feminine constancy, that of Nantucket must. Just think what a deal of waiting has been done here on the island by its generations of sailors' wives. The women used to wed men, but their lifelong partners were often, I take it, but memories and hopes. I think if my wife ever proves fickle, I shall bring her here to see what an air so saturated with the other sort of thing can do for her."

"I fear Nantucket wives didn't always deserve the praise you give them. They were not always constant. Enoch Ardens have been plentiful on Nantucket."

"I don't blame people for not being constant to memories," he said. "As well fasten substance to shadow; it reverses the order of nature."

They had reached Kate's house. Under the circumstances Edgerton rather looked and decidedly hoped to be invited in. Kate was in painful embarrassment. She could not ask him in, for she felt it would be breaking her pledge. But to dismiss him without ceremony, when he so evidently wished to linger, was equally out of the question. She compromised finally by continuing, almost involuntarily, to walk along past the house.

"I'm so glad you give me a little reprieve," said he, more pleased than disappointed by the manoeuvre.

A turn of the road brought the bay before their eyes. Moved by some association of ideas, he said,

"By the way, how fond of the sea Miss Follet is."

"Yes, very," Kate responded drily, and a moment after added,

"I don't like the sea. Let us walk the other way."

With a slight surprise he at once turned with her. A moment after she recalled that while bo-

fore it had been he who had invited himself to walk with her, she had now invited him. With a guilty sense that she had broken her pledge to the girls came a determination to make the best of it and to have as good a time as possible. Before, she had been preoccupied and embarrassed, but now she suddenly began to be quite vivacious, though not without a haunting fear that any corner of the street might bring them face to face with one of the Prism. She ridiculed in rather bitter fashion the various quaint and peculiar features of the town as they walked along, and then began to ask him questions on that theme of which the girls seemed never to be weary, New York and its fashionable life. She related to him the incidents of her single memorable trip to Boston, and how she wanted to go to the opera so much, but her uncle didn't think it was a proper place, and so she stayed at the hotel and cried.

And Edgerton as he listened, felt a great pity for this rich, full nature, starved in all its æsthetic longings, and had an inkling of the happiness it

would be to some man to show her the beauties of art, the splendor of wealth and the pomp of the great world, day by day feeding the hunger in her grand eyes with new spectacles. This feeling lent a tenderness and consideration to his manner of which he was perhaps scarcely conscious, but which she felt with an exquisite thrill. A very little real tenderness goes so far with women. He talked to her eloquently of the delights of the mind and the taste which a great city's life affords, and she listened with a longing look that was to him very pathetic. As they talked the twilight faded and they suddenly found themselves a mile or more out into the country and no houses near.

"Oh dear, how late it has got, what am I thinking of, we must hurry back," she exclaimed.

"No, let's not hurry," urged Edgerton, laying his hand lightly on her sleeve. "It is hurrying that makes people feel late."

It was an hour later and the stars were bright when they stopped at Kate's gate and she withdrew her arm from his.

"Good night, Miss Mayhew."

"Good night, Mr. Edgerton."

How softly shone her dark eyes!

When she entered the house she would not have been surprised to have found her father and mother ten years older, and her little brother Jim grown up, such an epoch had elapsed with her since she left them an hour or two before. But her mother merely asked if she had any letters, for it was steamer day, and she had been to the post-office when Edgerton overtook her.

Anna Coffin was calling on Mary Veeder one afternoon soon afterwards. Some people thought it odd that a keen-witted, rather cynical girl like Anna, who had one of the sharpest tongues in town, and never let it rust, should have as her particular friend such a placid maiden as Mary Veeder, a girl who was never in a hurry, never got vexed, and never was known to find fault with anybody. But so it was. There was nobody that Anna so well liked to talk to as Mary. She seemed to find one of her quiet smiles a more satisfactory and

stimulating response to her lively sallies than the brightest repartee anybody else could make.

Anna was just now sitting on an ottoman, clasping her knees, in an attitude she would not have taken if Edgerton had been there. One agreeable result of the lack of prying masculine eyes on the island is that girls can take their ease instead of being restricted to two or three attitudes, and required to keep as stiff as soldiers on parade, like the generality of their sex elsewhere. Anna was saying:

"You remember that promise Belle made us all make, not to flirt with him nor let him flirt with us, don't you? You know I told you it wouldn't amount to anything."

"Why not?"

"The idea of supposing a girl would mind a promise of that kind if she had any temptation to break it! Why such a promise is enough to break itself. There are some things that won't stand being promised, and that's one of them."

"What makes you think the girls aren't keeping it?" asked Mary with interest.

"I saw Kate Mayhew out walking with him the other evening, and they were gone two hours, and Liz says she saw him knocking at Ad. Follet's front door only last evening. So you see I knew just how it would turn out."

"Oh, there isn't necessarily any flirting about that," replied Mary. "He will call on us next. But I don't so well understand his walking out evenings with Kate. That looks more serious."

"Of course it does," said Anna, "and especially when you remember that Kate's chief aim in life is to get away from the island. She is ready to take for her Moses any man who will open a path for her through the sea."

"Not unless she loved him, if she wanted to go ten times as much, and you know that as well as I do," replied Mary with characteristic candor, "and as for Addie, I don't believe she could forget her sea dreams long enough to know whether anybody were flirting with her or not."

"Well I don't care," said Anna. "I'm provided for, and as for you, dear old darling, I be-

lieve you would see the last eligible young man in the world snapped up without a sigh."

Mary smiled.

"Of course you'll get married some day, you quiet old May; men are so lucky; but you won't need to fall in love. You'll make as good a wife without love as it takes a great deal of love to make most women. Now for instance I've got such a shocking sharp temper that I shouldn't dare to marry poor Ned if I didn't love him so much," and the girl's keen eyes grew very soft in their expression.

CHAPTER V.

IN A MERMAID'S PARLOR.

THE foregoing bit of talk makes it necessary to explain how it was that Edgerton came to the point of calling on Addie Follet.

He had not been long in finding out that Belle's story about its not being island etiquette to make calls, was probably a fib, though what was her motive in telling it he could not imagine. But he still felt the awkwardness of calling in view of the fact that the young ladies had so unanimously neglected to extend him any sort of invitation. Of course he could not suppose that they had done so purposely. The friendliness and even intimacy of his relations with them forbade that idea, but still it would have been pleasanter if they had not so curiously omitted to express the hospitable feelings he could not doubt they entertained. So it was with a sense of embarrassment not usual in

a caller of his extended experience that he stood on Addie Follet's doorstep one June evening.

The young lady who opened the door produced the always striking effect of a face and figure which correspond in expression, that expression being a peculiar spirituality. The figure owed its airy effect to grace in the lines, not to lack of fullness. The complexion was not brilliant but pure and rather pale, while away down into the grey eyes the light went shimmering as into sleeping summer seas. There are personal and impersonal eyes; personal eyes that are always full of an importunate individuality, and impersonal eyes that are the serene meeting-places of souls. When you looked into this young lady's eyes you did not see her at all; she seemed to leave her self behind to come and meet you there. She wore green ribbons in her wavy light brown hair.

At seeing who her caller was she appeared momentarily surprised and even confused. He answered her look,

"Well, Miss Follet, I know you haven't asked

me to call, and if you send me away I will go and make no disturbance, but I thought it was worth trying."

He said this in such a serious tone that she laughed.

"Of course I'm glad to see you, Mr. Edgerton," and she extended her hand frankly. "Come into the parlor."

Accustomed as he had been of late to meeting the girls only in companies, he was freshly surprised as they sat down to see how completely one woman fills a room. They had numerous common topics of interest, and conversation ought to have been easy enough, but somehow he could not forget that first look of surprise and embarrassment on her face, nor could she apparently forget the surprise itself. Awkward pauses began to occur in the conversation, neither of them having the least endowment of the useful faculty of supplying the lack of spontaneous talk with the manufactured article.

A vacuum in conversation has over some unfor-

tunately constituted minds an irresistible power to draw out, in spite of the volition, whatever is in them. It has been known by this sort of pure suction to drag impertinent questions from the most well mannered lips, or in other cases to induce involuntary and highly indiscreet confidences. A person who is unfortunate enough to have inherited this vacuum abhorrence from nature, feels impelled to fill up the yawning pause by throwing in whatever comes handiest, whether good, bad, or indifferent. To get that pause filled appears for the time the one object of life. So it happened that Edgerton, after vainly representing to himself the indiscreetness of the remark, blurted out,

“Why is it, Miss Follet, that the young ladies of Nantucket don't like to receive calls? Is it really a peculiar etiquette, or is it only to myself that the rule applies.”

Addie blushed as red as a rose, and Edgerton groaned at thought of the victim the vacuum suction had once more made of him. Still it might have been worse, for if the silence had lasted a

moment longer he would have been unable to refrain from telling his family secrets and stating his age and bank account. Addie began stammeringly,

“Really—Mr. Edgerton—that is a—an odd question. I really—” Then raising her eyes to his, she said impulsively,

“No, I’ll tell you the truth; that’s the best way out of it. You see, before you came, Belle made us girls all promise not to—not to—well not to—I mean, you know that we were not to—that is, we were to entertain you as a club, you see, and not as individuals.”

What on earth made her blush so, he couldn’t guess, but this symptom did not make him less desirous of pursuing the subject, and besides that, his curiosity was fully roused.

“Why not both ways?” he asked with a mystified expression. “You must know that my taste for the society of the young ladies is only piqued by the little bits of you contributed to a joint entertainment.”

"Mr. Edgerton, I'm not going to tell you anything more about it. You may find out the rest for yourself. The girls would scold me if they knew I had said a word, but you cornered me and that was mean of you."

"It was very mean, but if you knew how puzzled I have been over the matter you would excuse me, and for the matter of that I am more puzzled now than ever."

The little scene had brought them into spontaneous relations, and he began to be having a delightful call, and on her part Addie seemed bent on making him feel welcome if uninvited.

"You needn't be looking at that piano so critically," she said after they had been talking some time, "I know how ridiculous it is."

"How ridiculous?"

"Why a piano on the sea shore! what could be more ridiculous than a little jingle like that trying to beat the surf out of one's ears!"

"Don't you play on it?" he asked with some surprise, for it struck him as strange that one into

whose face a "beauty born of murmuring sound" so evidently had passed, should not love music.

"Why yes," she said, "sometimes, just to please uncle, but I don't think somehow that most of the music means much to me. Maybe it is because it refers to the scenes of a life I haven't led. You know I've never been off the island."

"It must be that is the reason," he replied. "I don't see how anybody can understand a large part of music who has never seen a mountain, a forest, a river, or a city. Why here upon this sandbank you have not fairly got beyond the first day of creation; you don't rightly know what land is. Mother earth is no mother to you."

"No," replied she, "the sea is mother of us islanders and mother too of your mother earth. So you see we children of the sea belong to an elder branch of the family. The land is after all a new-fangled experiment, a mere parvenu, but the sea survives from the reign of chaos."

Casting about in his mind for some repartee, he

hit upon a fact he had learned in youth out of a physical geography.

"After all," he said, "your sea is a mere drop compared with the bulk of the solid earth; like a drop of dew on a mountain side compared with the mountain, and the scientific people say that the time will come when the seas will be wholly absorbed into the earth as a little water soaks into a great sponge, scarcely wetting it. The sea is spread out in an ostentatious sort of way, but really it is a very insignificant matter compared with the land you despise so much."

Addie for a moment was taken aback by this suggestion, and he smiled mischievously at her. Then she sprang to her feet crying,

"I don't care a fig for your scientists. Look there!"

She rolled up the window curtain, and as he stepped to her side the broad sound stretched out before him, a majestical burnished floor beneath the moon, a promenade for gods, while the noise of the waves caressing the shore, rose from the beach below.

She turned to him with a triumphant expression.

"Now tell me what use has land except to view the sea from!"

"That is the only use of sandbanks like Nantucket, certainly," he answered, "but there is a difference between land and sand, and land can be put to other uses. What, for instance, do you suppose the people of the interior States of the Union, who don't see the sea from generation to generation, would think of your notion?"

"Oh dear, it makes me sad to think of such people, and yet I suppose there must be a good many of them," she said with a pitiful contraction of her delicate eyebrows. "How do the poor folks live, and what queer, tired-looking eyes they must have that never get rested on a sea-view! Why I would as soon think of having no sky as no sea. It is very odd that God should have made the sky go everywhere so all can see it and not the sea as well. Did you ever know anybody who had never seen the sea? What sort of people were they?"

"Oh, yes, I have seen lots of them," he said,

smiling at the oddity of the question, and feeling as if he were gratifying a mermaid's curiosity about the habits of land-livers. "There is nothing queer in their appearance, I assure you. In a crowd you would not be able to pick them out by any peculiarity of their eyes or any other eccentricity. Why, Miss Follet, a slight difference in their industrial or social conditions would affect their characters much more than it does to miss the sea. It just shows how far we are beneath the influence of the greatest things. I suppose insects don't see the sky or sea at all, and we humans barely see them, without much better comprehending them. So far from regarding themselves as isolated, I dare say most of these sea-less folk in the interior look upon Nantucket as a very provincial locality, quite out of the way."]

She smiled disdainfully.

"Out of the way ! Out of what way ? I should like to know. It seems to me that islands like this are the true centres of the earth, set as they are in the middle of the two skies, surrounded by one and

overhung by the other. Where else in the world is one so centrally located?"

He would have liked it better to have had her look at him while she talked, but as she sat by the open window her eyes constantly roamed over the sea and she seemed thence to draw her inspiration.

"You look quite rapt, Miss Follet," he said. "Tell me what you see."

"I can't, and I would rather not if I could. Just as soon as I can quite say what I feel, it takes it off my heart, and I'd rather have it there. I don't dare try to wing my dearest thoughts with words, lest they should fly away."

"I have such odd feelings," she added dreamily, "as I sit in my window here and see the steamers sail away to the continent. I should lose a great dream if ever I went there, I suppose."

When at last he rose to go, she said,

"Although I mightn't invite you, I suppose I may ask you not to hurry."

"I think I'll not risk making myself tedious to-

night," he replied, "but since you are kind enough to say that I might stay longer, won't you let me finish my call some other evening?"

"It's unfair to ask me that. You know I mustn't invite you. What you may be able to do, I'm sure I don't know," she replied demurely.

"After all," he mused going home, "the inspiration of feminine society does not quite follow the rule of a galvanic battery, increasing with the number of cups. Several women may diffuse a greater quantity of electricity, but it is less intense in quality than that of one."

Addie had enjoyed the evening quite strangely well. When with the other girls she was rather overborne as being the youngest, but once alone with Edgerton she felt as a woman his peer. She had known nothing at all of the society of men of her own mental grade, and she took a girl's delight in representing for the first time her sex over against a man of culture, enjoying the power she wielded over him as a novel sensation, and feeling its reaction upon herself in an unusual exhilaration.

It had been for years her custom, just before going to bed, to go down to the beach and sit on the sand or wander there until she felt like sleeping. It was a sort of preparation for the night, which wonderfully predisposed her to repose. The suggestions of boundless space, of immeasurable strength, of eternal patience, of motion that had not paused nor rested since the impulse of creation, raised her thoughts to a plane whither personal preoccupations could not follow. And often when her feelings were finely attuned, sympathy with the eternities and infinities so grandly typified before her would grow to an impassioned intensity, and tears of a bliss almost too great to bear would fill her eyes.

After such experiences with what incredible peace would she lay her head upon the pillow! Death itself she was wont to think could not be sweeter, more serene to harassed hearts than the sleep that closed eyes freshly washed with such tears. And indeed it might well be so, seeing that in being purged of self and personal thoughts she

was like one who is dead. I would by no means leave the impression that there was anything abnormal in the experience of this most human maiden. She had only, by her lonely life with the sea and her spiritual nature, attained a faculty of sharing to an unusual degree that calming and elevating communion which all the grand forms of nature are ready to pour into any human heart which turns to them in self-forgetfulness for the refreshment that comes from elevation out of the personal sphere.

For a long time after Edgerton's departure Addie sat in a pleasing reverie, staring into vacancy and anon absently smiling, as she thought over something that had been said. Suddenly she started up, caught her shawl, and with an agitated step hurried down to the beach. This nun of the sea felt like a devotee who has allowed worldly thoughts to make her forget the hour of prayer. Not that she had actually forgotten her hour by the shore, but she felt that she was all untuned for the rhythm of the eternities to-night. For a

while she walked up and down, not in her usual slow dreamful saunter, but with a quick, nervous step, while she strove to dominate her mind and drive out the swarm of profane intruding thoughts. Soon she found that though she should do this she could not remove the agitation and distraction they left behind.

Her cheeks burned with self-contempt at her folly in allowing an engrossment of such a sort to obscure and render turbid even temporarily the serene and passionless frame requisite to a spiritual rapport with the sea. She was not angry with Edgerton, but with herself. His self-conceit indeed would have received a mortal shock if he could have known how insignificant he and all thoughts of him appeared to her in comparison with the lofty and precious communion which he had been the innocent means of interrupting.

Finally she began to cry, and it was not till an hour or so later, that having wept away her feverishness she left the beach, once more comparatively soothed and calmed.

CHAPTER VI.

A "SQUANTUM."

NOW Edgerton had never attended a squantum, and the girls had fixed on the second day after his call on Addie as the date on which they were to initiate him into that delightful mystery. Belle warned him to eat a light breakfast, and at about ten o'clock in the morning the party rendezvoused at the wharf where the *Dream* lay. Belle and Edgerton got there first, Mary Veeder and Anna Coffin soon after arrived, and then Lizzio Folger, who doated on squantums and good things to eat generally, tastes which she was perfectly frank in avowing at all times. She was a bluff sort of girl, a word that, although not a feminine one, just expresses her good-humored, frank air, her slight obtuseness to the finer feminine conventionalities, and entire lack of those affectations of refinement which, though affectations, seem in some de-

gree essential to the charm of women. It was these characteristics which made Belle so sure that Edgerton was in no danger of being fascinated by Lizzie.

Belle and Kate, Mary and Anna, naturally paired, but Liz had no particular friend, being hail fellow with all, while Addie was without an intimate both on account of her being younger and equally, perhaps, because of her peculiar temperament, which either did not demand sympathy or found it elsewhere than among her companions."

"I wonder if Addie isn't ever coming," said Anna Coffin. "The sun is getting hot here on the wharf, and it's time we were off."

Edgerton turned to Anna with an involuntary gesture of surprise. In his own mind the idea of Addie's being in the party had been so central to the whole scheme, that he had forgotten that the excursion might still seem feasible to the others with her left out. But at this moment she appeared at the other end of the wharf, leisurely walking toward them, swinging her hat in her hand by its

green ribbon. As they exchanged salutations, Edgerton eagerly scanned her face to divine by its expression whether their recent interview had the same roscate hue in her memory as in his own. But her steady glance gave no hint of anything of the sort, and he even thought that he detected an unusual air of indifference if not even of coolness in her bearing toward him, an appearance that completely puzzled and not a little disappointed him, for on the strength of that delightful call he had been really counting on having attained a more intimate standing with this strangely fascinating girl.

The squantum was to be held at a point on the narrow peninsula, or rather mere sandbar, that divides the ocean from the broad lagoon which extends for many miles above the harbor proper of Nantucket. Two men who were to prepare the clambake which the party were to eat, had gone on to the spot selected for it, and as considerable time would be consumed in their preparations, there was an opportunity for a sail before it would

be necessary to repair to the squantum ground. the *Dream* was accordingly headed out to sea. It is a very bad humor or a confirmed melancholy that can withstand the exhilaration of a sailboat's bound on a live sea, and as the *Dream* rounded Brant Point and shot out toward the bell buoy before a freshening breeze, Edgerton's spirits began to recover from the effect of Addie's coolness.

Kate, too, who sat at his side so near that the tiller, as he held it well a-port, almost touched her bosom, was very pretty to-day, and very entertaining. He no more thought of analyzing her unusual attractiveness than that of the weather, but to the girls it was a matter of ribbons, a thing to get the recipe of as of a toothsome cake. They inferred that she had some special motive for being pretty and guessed at what that was. Women overlook each other's cards in the game against men.

"How beautiful!" cried Edgerton, as suddenly the sun burst out from behind a cloud and the whole bay glowed above its shoals in a car-

pet of green and blue and purple, of tints more varied, more delicate, and deep, than ever tinged a painter's dream.

"It is the palette of God," exclaimed Addie.

"And just to think," said Edgerton, "that if we saw that every day, we are capable of getting so accustomed to it that we should finally take no notice at all. One would think that susceptibility to the beautiful and grand was nothing better than a sore spot, from the haste with which a tough scab of habit grows over the sensitive place."

"Listen to the bell buoy," said Mary.

They were now sailing close by it, and the inexpressibly mournful notes of the wave-tolled bell fell occasionally on their ears.

"The waves toll the requiem of their own victims," said Kate, "as much as to say they are not to blame for the deeds they do, and mourn for the woes they cause."

"It reminds me of an Æolian harp I heard at Woodstock," said Belle. "It is strange what sad things the wind and the sea have to say when we

give them a voice, and how personal it seems to make them to our fancy when they are made to speak by such contrivances."

Edgerton was making preparations to tack so as not to get too far out in the bay, when Kate seized the tiller and brought the boat again to her former course.

"Girls," she cried, "we are six to one. Let's mutiny and carry the ship over to the mainland, and go to New York instead of to the squantum. The wind is just right and we could sight Wood's Hole before three o'clock. We may never have so good a chance again to get away from that old sandheap," and she pointed contemptuously to the low lying white shore in the distance, "what do you say?"

"I'm willing," said Anna gayly. "Ned wrote last week that he was dying to see me."

"I believe it is the customary procedure in cases of mutiny to pitch the captain overboard. I trust you will make an exception in my case," said Edgerton.

"Yes," replied Kate, "we give you your life on condition that you navigate for us."

Although she was smiling, her eyes flashed so imperiously and her air was so resolute, that knowing as they did her absorbing desire to get away from the island, neither Edgerton nor the girls knew exactly how much in earnest she might be, and some of them began to look rather serious.

None had observed the approach of a thick mist drifting from windward, and which now suddenly and completely enveloped them so that vision beyond a distance of ten feet was impossible. The sun was blotted out, and all their bearings instantly lost. Kate dropped the tiller crying:

"The island has sent the fog to overtake its escaping prisoners. Here, Mr. Edgerton, take us back to our dungeon. The mutineers give in."

"We shall never get back to dinner," exclaimed Lizzie, disconsolately.

"If another boat happens to run against us we shall never get back at all," observed Mary, suggesting the only serious danger of their position.

Edgerton could only judge of their course by the way the sail was drawing, and relying on this clue he put the boat about and steered as nearly as he could calculate for the bell buoy. They had been on this tack for about ten minutes, listening intently for the bell, when as suddenly as it had come up the fog disappeared, and just in time to enable Edgerton, by thrusting his tiller hard a-starboard, to escape striking another boat with which ten seconds more of fog would have brought the *Dream* into collision.

"Thank God," he ejaculated.

The girls looked at each other with pale faces.

"That's spoiled my appetite," said Liz, shrugging her shoulders.

"I wonder how it would have seemed," said Kate, with a grimace of aversion at the water. "To be drowned in a fog, of all things! Ugh! The sea would have swallowed us without winking and looked as sleek and purred as softly right after, as a cat that has eaten a mouse. Your sea is no better than a cat, Addie, what do you say to that?"

Addie had been more silent even than usual during the entire sail, but it was not as commonly, on account of an absorbing enjoyment. She seemed on the contrary, moody and absent, and as if quite missing her customary exhilaration when on the water. Edgerton had made several attempts to draw her into conversation and would have felt rather snubbed at his lack of success had she not once or twice responded with glances in which some other sentiment seemed strangely mingled with repulsion. It was some girlish caprice, he concluded, which made her more fascinating if more provoking. He had erred, he concluded, in ascribing to her a singularly limpid nature.

"I'm in no humor to defend the sea to-day, Kate," she replied, to that young lady's challenge.

"Let me take up the gauntlet, then," said Edgerton.

"You complain that the sea doesn't care a rap whether we live or die, but that's precisely the key to the highest sort of sympathy we mortals have with it, for it is an impersonal sympathy, in which

*the sea
is the sea
any is
a sea
sea
is
imposed*

we as much forget our personalities as it ignores them. Unless it did ignore them and compel us to, we could not have that kind of sympathy with it."

"Write that down on a piece of clean paper, and I'll chew it up and swallow it. That's the only way I shall ever get it into me," laughed Kate.

"Mr. Edgerton, I didn't know you could talk so hard," said Liz reproachfully; "When I hear people talk about personal and impersonal, it makes me feel dreadfully stupid. I'm sure I could never learn what the difference is."

Solidarity

"It is a pity if the difference is so hard to understand," replied Edgerton rather seriously, "for by the cultivation of the impersonal side of our natures is to be found the apotheosis of humanity, which has been its aspiration ever since Adam and Eve ate the apple in the hope of being as gods."

"I knew something was in the wind when I saw Mr. Edgerton talking so confidentially with Swain the bookseller yesterday. They were plot-

ting to make a corner in unabridged dictionaries," remarked Anna Coffin drily.

By this time the *Dream* had re-entered the harbor and rounding First Point, was standing up the lagoon with the long barren peninsula of Coatue on the port side.

"Aren't you going to tell me something about a squantum first, to prepare my mind a little," asked Edgerton.

"Only this," replied Mary, "that whereas you are already familiar with the sight of the sea, the touch of the sea, the smell of the sea, the sound of the sea, we now propose to give you the taste of the sea."

They soon came in sight of the two men who had been sent on ahead. They were busying themselves on the beach, and as the *Dream* approached shouted out to Edgerton to heave anchor as the Coatue shore was too shallow to admit of near approach. They then put off in the dory to land the party. On the beach above where the men were working stood a weather-beaten little hut,

which Edgerton was informed was the dining-room.

"They camp there too when they come over duck hunting," explained Lizzie.

"You don't mean to say people kill birds here on the island," said he. "I should think in such a lonely place they wouldn't want to spare any company."

The party was soon safely landed by the dory, not without considerable fun and fluttering of white draperies.

"This is Contue," cried Kate, as she sprang ashore.

"What a name!" said Edgerton.

"It's an Indian name and I'm sure I think it quite fits the place for uncouth dismalness," Kate replied. "The Indians who lived here must have been a melancholy set and I don't blame them. All the Indian names on the island have the same plaintive sound. They suit so well they have never been changed."

It was indeed a dreary place—a mere ridge of

white sand, a hundred yards broad, barring the sea from the lagoon, its surface above high water mark covered with a scattered growth of long stiff grass, forever bending before the constant wind, and yet ever striving to assume the perpendicular posture it had never attained. Anna said it was like human beings, always trying to be good and never succeeding, but Kate declared that if she thought she cut such a pitiable figure as that grass she would give over trying at once.

"I never see anything attempting to grow on this island without wanting to pull it up by the roots, and put the poor thing out of its misery," remarked Edgerton. "The attempts at vegetation here are merely pathetic."

"So we are," assented Kate, "and it would be a real charity if you would pull us all up by the roots, and put us out of our misery."

"I must correct that cruel misconception," he retorted. "for in human culture Nantucket has much more than made up for her agricultural failure. I don't know any place in the world where

the survival of the fittest has been so beautifully illustrated: six of the spiritual to one of the material sex left. The result should be forwarded to Darwin; it would put him into ecstasies."

"Oh, oh, just hear that," cried Bello.

"You couldn't get Mr. Edgerton in so tight a place, but that he would turn the tables on you with a compliment," said Kate, with just a trace of that pique which we feel to hear those whose flatteries we have allowed to please ourselves, making their compliments general.

"I wish he would teach our island boys the gift before he goes. I am afraid we shall miss it when he leaves us," said Mary.

"Oh, yes, do," cried Lizzie, "I think it's such fun to be flattered, and we get so little of it. Flatter us some more, please, Mr. Edgerton."

While they had been taking their sail the men had got the oven prepared and the clams dug. The former process had consisted in placing a lot of paving stones close together in a spot sheltered

from the wind and burning several armsful of pine wood upon the hearth thus made.

"When the stones begin to scale we know the oven is hot enough," explained one of the men.

This test having now been met the embers had been removed and all the ashes carefully brushed away from the hot stones. Near by stood several buckets full of hard and soft shell clams, which had been dug out of the sand while the fire was burning.

"I wonder if you Nantucketesses appreciate your blessings," said Edgerton. "Just think of a potato bed all around the island, with nothing to do but to take a hoe and dig up a dinner whenever you feel hungry. You don't even have to plant these sea-potatoes. They plant themselves."

"What an Irishman's paradise ! as if clams were really potatoes !" said Belle, who had been to the mainland and seen Irishmen.

On the cleaned stones of the oven were now dumped a couple of pails of hard shell clams. They hissed and began to open their shells.

"Ugh, poor fellows!" ejaculated Addie, with a sympathetic contortion of countenance. "How it must hurt."

"Oh, don't be spoiling our appetites," protested Lizzie.

A couple of pails of soft shells were now poured over their hard shell brethren, the savory steam of whose torment was already rising.

"If burnt sacrifices smelled that well to the old-fashioned gods, I don't wonder they had a weakness for them," said Anna.

"How one has to harden his heart to keep it soft," observed Edgerton. "If we let ourselves deliberately realize the horrible cruelty we are inflicting it would make brutes of us, but by going ahead and refusing to realize it we can remain good Christians and have our baked clams, too."

"Oh dear, do let's stop it then and not have any clam bake," cried Liz, with an accent that indicated her full sense of the magnitude of the sacrifice. But her appetite was reconciled with her conscience by the assurance that as the clams were

half roasted now it would be more cruel to take them off.

"It would be so much nicer, though," said she, "if the clams could enjoy it as much as we do. I don't see why they weren't made so they could."

The men, grinning at the talk, meanwhile went on with the preparations. Upon the clams were quickly laid a couple of chickens, wrapped in cloths, a number of sweet potatoes and several ears of green corn in the husks. Then taking a great pile of wet seaweed, fresh from the sea, they packed it over and around the mass, at least six inches thick, and before the steam had begun to penetrate this covering, a thick layer of sand was piled on the whole baking and spanked down with the shovel.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said the cook, "in just forty-five minutes dinner will be ready."

"Come, girls, we must be setting the table," was Belle's comment on this announcement, and with that she led the way to the hut a few rods distant. The other girls were following her when Edgerton asked:

"Aren't you going to detail some one on fatigue duty, to entertain me while you are at it?" half hoping that he might get a little talk with Addie. But this hope was disappointed, for Belle replied :

"Kate, you are detailed for that purpose, and let your conversation be as little filling as possible, for he must save his appetite."

"You couldn't have made a fitter selection for that purpose," said Edgerton, as Kate turned smilingly towards him, and then, after pausing just long enough to enjoy her hurt, surprised look, he added, "because her conversation always leaves you wishing for more."

"What did you make that pause for, sir?" she demanded, as the others laughed.

"Because playing with edged tools is sometimes fun, and your displeasure would have a very sharp edge for me."

"I shall have to forgive you," said Kate. "You have fairly plucked the flower safety from the nettle danger."

He brought her a chair from the hut and stood

himself on the beach by her side, leaning against the low bluff that overhangs high water mark all along the shore.

"The town has a very picturesque effect from here," he said, pointing away across the lagoon to where the steeples and house-covered hillside of Nantucket rose imposingly from the water.

"I think it has a very hateful effect from every point of view," replied she, with something that was like real bitterness in her tone and the expression of her brilliant eyes as they rested on the town. It was an expression that gave him a sense of commiseration for Nantucket. It seemed as if it must feel the ban of so much beauty.

"What has it done?" he asked.

unborn
"Why its being here at all. If it had not been here, I could not have been born on it, could I? It ought to have been got out of the way to prevent such accidents. So long as it is left no unborn soul is safe. Indeed I never do feel as if I had been born here at all, but as if I had been banished here. I must have been a

murderess and committed sacrilege besides in my last state of existence. I should not else have been punished with such a doom."

" ' Full many a rose was born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air ! ' "

repeated Edgerton, "and, Miss Mayhew, when a poor Robinson Crusoe like myself lands, he perceives the goodness of God in the dispensation."

"You have turned a neat compliment, and I'm sure the rose is glad to afford gratification to so gentlemanly a Crusoe, but Crusoe goes and the rose is left behind, and it's dull waiting for Crusoes. Nay, I'm not sure but the coming and going of Crusoe makes the desert yet more intolerable for that very gleam of society."

A rose indeed she looked as she sat there, her shining eyes fixed on the distant town while she talked, and her flushed cheeks framed in with dark hair. There was that touch of pensiveness in her air that gives the final charm to such bold beauty as hers.

"But surely you can't call a place of several

thousand inhabitants, like Nantucket, a desert. Nor with such delightful months to look back upon can I easily understand discontent with its society."

"True enough," replied Kate, "there are several thousand of us, but don't you see that our interests are so narrow and similar that there would be more variety in a city company of a dozen than can be found on the whole island? And Mr. Edgerton, perhaps you wouldn't find the society here so stimulating if—if you were, for example, a girl," and she smiled slightly.

*See note
the person
would* { "And then I fancy that our lives lack a something quite indescribable, a sort of tone and nervous stimulus that I'm sure must come from being in close connection with the great world. The sea might as well be a sea of glass, so thoroughly does it insulate us from the electricity of the world's life. That, I suppose, is the use of the crystal sea about the New Jerusalem. But they'll have better company and more resources there, and can afford to be isolated from the earth."

"By the way, Miss Mayhew, I wish you would tell me one thing. Did you really intend to run off with the boat and us this morning? I couldn't quite make out."

"Well I can't help you," she replied, looking squarely at him, "for I'm sure I don't know myself. I often become so desperate about staying here any longer that I don't know what I shouldn't be capable of to get away. It doesn't seem to me that I can ever get resigned and settle down to being a clam like the people over in the town there, but I suppose that will be my fate finally," and she dropped her voice to a despairing tone.

"Do you know, Mr. Edgerton, that it sometimes gives me very wicked feelings when I think of your happy fate in returning soon to the rich, broad, deep, electric life of the great world. I have such an envy that I could use almost any violence to rob you of your good fortune if it were possible. Were it a thing transferable by fraud or force, you would not be safe alone with me."

She spoke with a passionate vehemence, and at

the same time with such a hopeless accent that he was shocked. Touched with profound sympathy for this beautiful, brilliant girl beating her life away against prison bars, his eyes glistened with pitiful moisture as he looked on her. Her own, hard and bright a moment before, suddenly welled over at this in mere self pity, and it was with a strong effort that she suppressed her sobs. Her situation had never seemed so desolate to her before.

In generous natures pity is so akin to love as often quite to usurp its place, and by the magnetic rapport established through their sympathetic emotion, she had a premonition of a coming crisis which made her heart beat thick and hot.

Belle's voice came just then from the door of the hut, crying:

"Come, children, the table is set and we want you to help us wait for dinner."

Kate was really half relieved by this interruption. She felt so unstrung that she welcomed a postponement even of a welcome consummation.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Edgerton," she said, with rather a quivery smile, "for talking so extravagantly and so much about myself. I didn't mean to force you into the confidence of my trials. Only somehow it all came out of itself when you began to praise that hateful town. You had better go to them. I will come as soon as I have gotten over this."

He pressed her hand, she looking away, and left her. They did not know that they should never be brought so near to each other again.

But as soon as he saw Addie he knew that it was only pity he had felt. The pangs of gross physical hunger which now suddenly seized him, completed the discomfiture of any lingering sentiment. The rude interior of the little hut fairly glowed with girlish beauty, like a murky cave hung with stalactites. A rough table had been set, with a lot of battered and chipped crockery. Fifteen minutes passed in pensive silence, waiting for dinner, the mental vacancy of the company typifying their physical condition. The island air nourishes

an appetite which, like fire, is a useful servant, but a terrible master. Finally, Edgerton, who sat in the door, shouted,

“Hurrah, here they come.”

A dish of smoking clams, beautiful in death, exhaling blessed odors from their yawning shells, was borne in and set on the table. A plate of corn, the chickens, and a dish of sweet potatoes followed. And then they drew their improvised chairs around the board and fell to.

But all first waited to see Edgerton eat his first soft-shell. A clam without blemish, of medium size, swimming in the ichor of his distilled soul, and with a neat head to hold on by, was selected by the joint discrimination of the young ladies. A somewhat spirited discussion arose among them as to whether he should be advised to use any seasoning or not, which was finally decided in the negative. Having been duly instructed, amid the breathless silence of the company, he then entombed the morsel, and uttered a groan of shuddering delight.

"How do you like it?" cried they, beamingly.

"Like it!" he echoed. "If Descartes had vis^{ed} ^{a but} ^{two} ^{intellechual} ited Nantucket, instead of '*cogito ergo sum*,' he would have said, 'I have eaten a soft-shell, *ergo sum*.' The most convincing proof of existence is, the flavor of soft-shells."

With jests and laughter the banquet went on, and plate after plate of clams disappeared as by magic. The chickens cooked with the clams were redolent with their sea flavor, and supplied to the palate at least the missing link between fish and fowl. The corn and potatoes had not the less suffered a sea change into something rich and rare.

"You needn't be pushing your clam shells over on my pile, Anna Coffin," said Belle, "I've eaten enough in all conscience without having to answer for your sins."

"I wasn't," Anna protested, "and if the poor little fellows were alive they would say it was mean enough to eat 'em up without denying it afterwards. But just look at that pile Liz has left."

"I'm afraid," said Mary, "that we have all hopelessly lost our reputation for spirituality with Mr. Edgerton, unless perhaps Kate and Addie. What's the matter with you two?"

But they declared that they had eaten heartily, while at the same time each cast a searching glance at the other.

After dinner, Edgerton sat in the doorway smoking cigars, and they fell to talking up the programme of amusements for the coming weeks. All voted for more squantums, and moonlight sails were added as a corrective to their too materialistic tendency. And then there must be lots of blue-fishing; it was just beginning to be good. And they must take at least one trip to S'conset, show Edgerton the merits of the island cart, and get some surf bathing. They had fun enough for six months laid out when the girls declared it time to go home.

"But where's Addie?" said some one.

"I noticed her slip off about half an hour ago, she went across the bar toward the beach on the other side," said Mary Veeder.

Edgerton with suspicious alacrity offered to go and find her. A hundred steps brought him to the verge of the low sand bluff that overhung the sea beach. His eye commanded its entire sweep from Great Point, at the extreme end of the long finger which Nantucket reaches out toward the northeast, to beckon mariners upon her fatal shoals, southwestward to First Point at the lower end of Coatue, a hollow curve of sand beach twelve miles long, more perfectly fashioned by the waves than a geometrician could have drawn it. The light swell of Vineyard Sound was breaking in a constant succession of low rollers all along the shore with a pleasant lapsing sound, while far over the blue sunlit waters the white sails of a score of coasting vessels were slipping along the horizon.

Just below where Edgerton stood, at the edge of the highest ripple, a dainty figure lay half reclined upon a shawl. It was one little bit of humanity contrasted with the ocean, and yet it struck Edgerton that that small form contained a world as vast as the ocean, a life as incomprehen-

ble, and problems, to him at least, far more piquant. His footfalls on the soft sand were inaudible, and Addie did not observe his approach until she heard him say,

"Miss Follet, excuse me for interrupting your tete-a-tete with the ocean."

Then she raised her head from her hand, looked around, and seeing him, rose up quickly with the dazed air of one called suddenly to pass from a receptive to an active mood.

"I should scarcely think you would dare to stay so near the sea, for fear Neptune or Triton might run away with you."

"I'm not afraid," she answered. "The sea isn't a person, I'm sure; I never liked that old heathen notion. The sea would lose all its grandeur if I thought of it that way. It is a great life without anything personal in it; that is what makes it so restful."

"You are a genuine devotee of the sea, Miss Follet," said Edgerton, with a feeling curiously like jealousy.

"If you knew how much I owe it, you would not wonder that I love it," she answered, her eyes roving joyously over the vast watery plain. "Whenever I feel confused, or muddled or fretted, I come and lie on the shore, and the tides rise up into my heart and wash it free and fresh, and leave me calm and serene. The sea confesses and shrives me."

"Did you feel confused and muddled to-day?" asked Edgerton, quick to suspect, with the conceit usual in young men, that he might have been the cause of her unrest.

"Perhaps I did, Mr. Curiosity," she answered, "but I don't now. What did you come after me for?"

He humbly explained that the party having made ready to re-embark, she was found missing, and he was deputed to go in search of her.

The sail back was rather dumpish, socially speaking. Kate, who generally talked briskly, was very sober, Addie was self-absorbed, and Edgerton was wondering if she were offended with

him, and had himself less than usual to say. He saw moreover that Anna Coffin's keen eyes were watching Kate and Addie suspiciously, and several times her glance rested rather meaningly on him. He would sooner have had her guess the state of things than any other of the party, for he felt that she was not the sort of girl to tell secrets, however she might enjoy letting the interested persons understand that she was posted. Still he began to have a realizing sense of the difficulty he would find in attempting to conceal from the others any special feeling he might have for one of the young ladies. For the first time he found it rather awkward to be the only gentleman among so many of the other sex, and so far perceived the inconveniences of his monopoly that, had there been anybody he could have divided it with, he would for the moment have favorably entertained the idea.

CHAPTER VII.

HAVE MERMAIDS HEARTS?

THAT evening he called on Addie, anxious to ascertain in what way he could have offended her. But he was welcomed with such a timid pleasure, and treated with such friendliness, that he forgot his rebuffs of the morning, save as an occasional puzzled recollection. How should he imagine that after his departure she had a fit of crying at her sea-window.

During the month that followed, every few evenings he turned his steps in the direction of the little house on the bluff outside the town, frowning his eyebrows and chewing his moustache, over the puzzle of Addie's contradictory moods. For if one evening she was affable, and as he might even fancy, a trifle tender, on the next he would find her cold, brilliant, and airily distant.

Whether fancifully or not, he came to associate

her moods with those of the sea. On tempestuous nights he generally found her in a state of nervous excitement, her cheeks flushed, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her manner vivacious, headstrong, and as repellant to tenderness as it was intellectually attractive. On calm, fair evenings, she was on the contrary, so gentle, so yielding, so almost warm in her bearing, that walking home he could not contain his delight, but would break forth in improvised foolishness and ejaculations that brought night-capped heads out at upper windows. Strange that the depth and earnestness of emotions are so often measured by the incoherence of the expression they find!

Coquetry was so evidently unknown to Addie, that he could only fancy that some counter influence was working against him, though there was almost as little chance of a rival of flesh and blood as there would have been in a desert.

During all this period Addie's heart was the theatre of a singular and painful conflict of varying balance. The whole habit of her mind predis-

posed her to impersonal moods of emotion, and love, with the strong personality of its passion, had set her at cruel odds with herself. Her heart contended with her soul. Often, strange, warm tides stirred the passionless peace the ocean had poured into her breast. Her pulses throbbed with delicious languid fullness, her heart swelled with longing, and a vague stress of tenderness moistened her eyes. But again, walking on the beach or floating in her little dory, her ears filled with the noise of the sea, and her eyes with its vastness, her spirit merging with its impersonal life, she had waking trances of such sublimity and all-satisfying fullness that she recalled with wondering self-reproach, almost with incredulity, those other times when the touch of a hand, a smile, a word, had laid a sweet spell on her, which made all else seem vague and unreal. As one upon a mountain top, exulting in the rare, chill, bracing air and god-like scope of vision, remembers loathingly the heavy perfumed air of slumberous valleys, as hermit saints awaking, recall with indignation the volup-

tuous enchantments of their dreams, so, with like self-despite did Addie then remember those soft moods which gave her lover such delight. Had Edgerton chanced to meet her when under the influence of one of these re-actions, he would have seen in her manner, not indeed any special unkindness toward himself, but such a calm and exaltation, more than happy, that in mere sense of the insuperable distance between them he would have turned away.

During the month that followed the squantum at Coatue, the programme of recreation then laid out was diligently followed. Every week saw at least one squantum, and such was Edgerton's infatuation for soft-shells, that Anna Coffin charged him with getting so hungry between the regular squantum parties, as to have slipped away up the harbor with a cook, and had clam-bakes all by himself on several occasions, an impeachment which he did not satisfactorily refute.

Meanwhile, by day and moony nights, the keel of the *Dream* fretted the waters of Vineyard

Sound, from Great Point to Muskeget. Anna Coffin, one day when they were out sailing, inquired of Edgerton what he would do if one of them should fall overboard. He said he presumed he should jump after her.

"That would be sacrificing the whole party," replied Anna, "for we can't manage the boat and should be capsized at once, and then you two would drown also."

This seemed so plausible that without more ado he taught them all the rudiments of sailing, and thereafter did mighty little of it himself, lolling about the boat at his leisure and pulling in the bluefish the girls had caught. He came to be so careless about the sailing as not unfrequently to endanger a capsizing. The girls did not know the peril, and he had a sort of superstitious impression that no accident could happen to a boat that held them. That even the grim forces of nature should not have a certain chivalrous sentiment toward fair women, is an idea which a man always finds it hard to realize.

The most delightful treats of all were the moonlight sails. On the one side stretched the low white shore of the island, and on the other the glistening water-floor reached out beneath and beyond the veil of the night. The contrast of the vast quietude of the lonely sea with the little group of warm, bright life in the stern of the boat, impressed them all with a feeling of closer mutual sympathy. Night obscuring the distant objects that made progress seem slow, the boat appeared to glide across the scene with preternatural swiftness, deluding the voyagers with a sense of peculiar lightness and power.

They sang together, Mary Veeder having a clear pure treble, and Kate a rich contralto, and sometimes Edgerton sat on the little half deck, facing them, his back leaning on the sail, and twanged his guitar to some old Spanish fandango that suggested the click of castanets, the gleam of dancing feet, and all the sensuous illusion of tropical moonlight.

One night, by some lucky chance, his hand

touched Addie's as she sat beside him in the stern. It started away at first from his quickly closing clasp like a frightened bird, and then yielding, I know not to what soft sudden impulse, she let it nestle trembling there. The boat had been standing close in shore to make a tack, but Edgerton seemed to have forgotten to come about. The *Dream* was within a hundred feet of the beach, and in five seconds more would have struck the sands, when a cry from Kate recalled the dreaming steersman. He was rather shocked afterwards to realize that he had pretty much made up his mind to let the boat strike rather than lose his clasp of that tremulous little hand. It was certainly fortunate for the party that Addie generally took care to keep such seductive fingers well out of his way.

Belle had divined that Kate was not wholly indifferent to her good looking cousin, and willing to help on in a quiet way, had several times invited her to tea, and on such occasions she and Edgerton had seemed to enjoy themselves very well. His liking and admiration for Kate were so hearty that

she was on the whole too much flattered to feel distinctly conscious of the lack of any warmer interest on his part.

Going from her to Addie, he was always strongly impressed with the difference between Kate's restless discontent and air of being oppressed and suffocated by the narrowness of her opportunities, and Addie's provoking content with her surroundings, and apparent incapacity for enjoying other spheres of life. While Kate's complaints at times slightly wearied him, he would have given a great deal to have sown seeds of a similar discontent in Addie's mind. That would have given him a vantage ground for the suit which day by day was more entirely monopolizing his thoughts.

His efforts to make Addie dissatisfied with Nantucket were indeed ingenious. Among other devices he had sent to New York for his collection of engravings, representing all the finest bits of American scenery, and on these he descanted to her evening after evening with a strenuous elo-

quence. One night after they had been looking over some really remarkable views of the Yosemite, Addie said,

"They are grand, and I can even understand now, how people can live without the sea, but I'm not sure I should care to see them."

"Why not?" he asked, very much disappointed.

"Why, I don't think," she replied, speaking slowly, as if thinking it out, "that persons ever need change their residence for the sake of a nearer or deeper sense of nature. When people get tired of the sea, or sky, or mountains, or forest, and want change, it only shows that they have not really touched their deeper sense at all, for that is inexhaustible. The deepest meaning of all these forms of nature must be the same, and those who understand one understand all, and don't need to travel."

"But people do travel and for the very sake of gratifying their taste for natural beauty," he urged.

"Yes, I know they do. I suppose in travelling one gets a great many new and delightful impressions of nature, but I can't help thinking that they lose the real deep loving sympathy with it that grows out of quiet contemplation. I should, I know."

He began to collect the pictures with a disheartened look that struck her as at once comical and pathetic. Nor could she help a certain amused impatience that he should thus ply her with his rivers and mountains and forests, to beguile her from the sea, when if he did but know it, so much stronger and tenderer and simpler a motive was fighting for him in her heart. She never meant he should know it and yet she could not resist the temptation of touching on the dangerous theme by asking,

"Why is it, Mr. Edgerton, that you are trying so hard to discontent me with Nantucket? It seems to me that you are very unkind."

He turned from the pictures and looked at her with an expression that said plainly as words,

"Don't you know?"

She did know, and at sight of her flushed cheeks and quickly averted eyes, he suddenly took courage, and seized her hand. The contact of a burning coal would not have stung his nerves like the touch of that soft palm. He poured forth a passionate declaration of his love, his hope, and the sense of his ill desert that made him seek an ally in her discontent with her present narrow life.

With dismay she felt the barriers of her reserve dissolving before a sudden tropic glow that burst forth she knew not whence. As a match touched to a hidden mine suddenly brings a fort about the ears of its unsuspecting defenders, so suddenly Addie felt her heart, long ago undermined, all at once giving way. She could not trust herself to speak, she could not even master courage to withdraw her hand from his, where, in spite of herself, it took delight in lingering.

Suddenly she swung open the blind of the window by which she sat, with a desperate hope that

somehow in the sea she might find help against herself.

Night covered the waters, and they stretched before her beyond the narrow horizon that day sets, to the further horizon of the imagination which night suggests.

She conceived the boundless stretches where the waves were sullenly feeling their way through darkness round the earth, as they did in the ages before light was. She thought of the vast sunlit seas of the South, where the countless wavelets are each tipped with an ephemeral foam-flower, whose petals, even as they sparkle into life, are scattered, and their salty fragrance up-gathered by the wind to refresh some distant shore. The wind was rising and the sea moaned on the beach in travail with the coming storm. Such hours of rising tempests for her were always full of a weird and awful exhilaration. Never did she seem so wholly to leave herself behind, as when hanging rapt on the muttering lips of the sea.

It was only a moment, but as she turned to

meet the passionate inquiry of his eyes, it seemed to her that she turned from the face of chaos and old night, to confront an interlocutor in a parlor comedy. Now first withdrawing her hand from his forgotten clasp, she replied in the most indifferent manner,

"Oh, yes, I've heard of getting married, but I don't think I'd like it much. It must require peculiar people to take to it."

"But," said he with a ghost of a smile on his fallen countenance, and a miserable kind of persistence in spite of his perception of her utterly unpropitious mood, "if you could love me just a bit, perhaps it would not strike you as so peculiar."

"Oh, I never felt in love with anything yet, except perhaps the sea, and you are not in the least like the sea, Mr. Edgerton," she answered airily.

He was hit hard, but struggled bravely against the sick sense of disappointment her words and manner produced. The contradictoriness of her moods, her first evident yielding, and the succeed-

ing unaccountable change, left him quite as much puzzled as disappointed, and prevented him from quite despairing. And indeed, before he left her that night her manner grew again so kind, that but for the smart of so recent a rebuff, he would have been tempted to try his fate again. He could not make her out at all.

In what did Addie's fascination consist? I think partly in a sense of the rare distinction it was for you to find a place in a fancy, peopled with such fair and grand ideals. It is the society we keep in another's mind, and not merely the being there, which makes the charm of an intimacy.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIASCONSET.

THE day came on which the club had fixed for the Siasconset excursion. The programme contemplated a picnic in the woods half-way, a bath in the surf, and a moonlight drive home. The morning dawned brightly, and by nine o'clock Edgerton mounted the vehicle to pick up the party.

It was one of those "carts" peculiar to Nantucket, a big two-wheeled conveyance with sides so high, to protect the feet of the passengers from the chilling winds, that the entrance was by steps from behind. Seats there were none, and each of the party had to provide a chair from the kitchen or parlor. Rocking chairs were in most favor as affording a partial substitute for the lack of springs in the cart.

Edgerton called first for Addie, and as a fore-

seen result thereby secured that young lady as next neighbor for the trip. She had a rocking chair just suited to her, being one of those persons who look best in rocking chairs and in attitudes that have the least of stiffness in them. Kate he next stopped for, and the other girls in the order of their residences. Each had with her a little bundle containing her bathing dress, and in another her contribution to the picnic. They were all in high spirits, and the party drove out of town with horses galloping, Kate plying the whip, Addie holding the reins, and the rest of the girls screaming and laughing as the cart tilted from side to side. These sailors' daughters inherited the sailor's traditional fondness for equine dissipation.

They had the day before them, with two fresh horses, and as the picnic ground lay not far off they took a roundabout course, driving for an hour or so over the desolate, treeless, uninhabited moor that constitutes the interior of the island. Not even the bright sunshine could relieve the dreariness of the scene, and Edgerton declared that now

he had found out where the hypochondria of north-east storms was brewed.

"I wonder," he said, "the county commissioners don't put up gallows along from point to point in order to accommodate persons overtaken by the suicidal mania when crossing these moors. And to think of you girls shut up all your lives between the sea and this nightmare of a landscape!"

They laughed, as they generally did at Edgerton's tirades against the island. They were not insensible to that implied flattery which is conveyed by depreciatory remarks concerning our surroundings, the suggestion being that we deserve better things.

"As regards natural beauty," said Kate, "the whole island doesn't afford enough to support one soul on."

"Our souls," said Addie, "as well as our bodies, have to live off the sea."

"Mine calls for something stronger than water," was Kate's comment.

"You girls may say what you please," exclaimed Liz, with unusual vehemence, "I love the old island, and I wouldn't change it for any place I ever heard of. I should no more think of its being homely, than of criticising the looks of my father or mother. And I think it speaks better for a place to be loved by those who know it, than to be admired by strangers."

"It's always the homely places and persons that get loved the most, though I say it who shouldn't," said Anna.

"Of course," echoed Kate, "they have to be to be loved at all. It takes more love to love them."

"I really hope you won't lie awake nights pitying us, after you leave the island, Mr. Edgerton," said Mary.

"Don't talk of my leaving," he replied, "I don't think of it when I can help it."

"Oh do stay and settle down here," cried Liz. "That would be so jolly, wouldn't it girls?"

"It would indeed;" said Edgerton, "anyway I

wish you would help me at least to-day, to forget that I can't stay always."

They readily assented, and began merrily to discuss the prospects of the new settler. He was to be located in Abdiel Folger's house, on the main street. He was to get the principalship of the high school, and add to that the editorship of one of the island papers. He was also to have a special girls' class in German and Italian, and be the director of a reading club and take it to no end of squantums and sailing parties.

Then Anna Coffin, who, as an engaged girl, said things the others wouldn't have ventured on, suggested in her dry tone,

"But we haven't settled on whom he is to marry."

She said it out of pure mischief, and the result answered her expectations. Edgerton looked foolish and stared hard at the horses. Kate blushed hotly. Addie turned her face away, and Mary Veeder flushed slightly. Then Liz began to laugh, Belle joined, and the others were glad to

follow suit to cover their confusion, while Mary, unseen by Edgerton, reached over and pinched Anna's ear until she screamed.

With chatter of this sort they beguiled the way, till toward noon they began to pass through a plantation of scrub pines, about as high as a man. It was announced to Edgerton that these were the picnic grounds.

"Why, I thought we were going to picnic in the woods," he said, looking around with an air of close inspection, a half concealed grin on his face. "Bless your dear hearts, you don't call these things trees!"

Now Addie Follet had never seen a full sized tree in her life, the island lacking that feature, and in her innocence had always regarded these scrub pines with a good deal of awe. When Edgerton had been making light of the scenery of the island, she had privately thought that he would change his tone when he came to see these redoubtable woods. And so at this contemptuous dismissal of their merits as trees, she looked up in a disappointed way that went right to his heart.

"Do forgive me, Miss Follet, for slighting your trees. They are really very fine trees of their sort, a little small, some would say, but I'm sure quite as large for their size as is usual at this time of year," at which apologetic nonsense she smiled ruefully.

"How was I to know they were not proper trees? Are trees ever really much bigger?"

"I have a large circle of acquaintances among trees," he replied, "which are every one of them as tall as the mainmast of a frigate, and spread as much sail in the shape of leaves as a seventy-four. In fact, for aught I know to the contrary, they may be the very sails that make the earth go round. I wish to heaven I could persuade the infernal wood-choppers of that, and then perhaps they would quit stripping the country."

"Why such trees must be almost as big as mountains," was her thoughtful comment.

"Oh no, my unsophisticated mermaid," he replied. "The biggest trees cover the mountains, as the hairs cover an ox."

He tethered the horses, while the girls spread the table-cloth on the carpet of pine needles, and they fell to with island appetites.

"The balsamy odor of the pines is the nearest to a sea breeze that we have in the interior of the mainland," he said, "and the murmuring of the wind in the pine boughs is so like the surf that, what with both sensations, I have often felt the illusion of the sea quite strongly in the midst of a pine forest."

Lazily lying on his elbow, and looking at the girls, he realized how the sylvan setting revealed their charms with new effects after so often seeing them grouped against the bare flat background of beach and sea. The various contrasting and harmonious forms and contours of the trees and bushes relieved the grace of the girlish figures in a remarkable manner.

But his admiration of the other girls did not in the least lessen the peculiar distinction which Addie had in his eyes. She seemed compared with women, as women compared with men, a sort of

third sex, an individual sex. He might scan the others with a critical appreciation; on her he simply looked.

Let me once more try to catch the glamour of that face. It was small, oval, and pearly pale, the forehead a shade high, perhaps, or the way she wore her hair made it seem so, the lashes long over the grey eyes, so deeply bright; the lips red and full enough to temper to a sweet humanity the dreaminess of the upper face. Her beauty would not have forcibly struck a casual observer; it was reticent like herself.

After dinner the picnickers rambled a while in the woods. Coming upon Addie alone in an alcove among the trees, Edgerton said,

"You don't know how happy I am for once, to get you fairly out of sight and sound of the sea."

"Why?" she asked.

"Odd as the idea is, I can't help feeling that the sea is the rival I owe my sad fortunes to," he replied jestingly, for though such an idea had often arisen in his mind as a fantasy that would account

for much that was otherwise unaccountable in her demeanor, to seriously entertain so extravagant a notion had never occurred to him.

He was astounded when she quietly replied,

"Yes, perhaps it is something that way. I suppose I can't make up my mind between you, and I'm quite tired trying. You must fight it out together, if I'm worth fighting for."

She smiled as she spoke, but the perplexed expression of her face sufficiently indicated that however fantastic the dilemma might appear, it was a serious one to her.

"But—but," sputtered Edgerton, "how in heaven's name can I fight the sea?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied, in a voice that was decidedly discouraging, though not unsympathetic.

And with that she walked away leaving him in a quandary similar to that of the prince in the fairy tale, who is required to remove a mountain or make trees grow bottom upwards, as the condition of marrying the princess.

By one o'clock they were once more rolling along the road toward Siasconset or S'conset, as everybody called it. It was a queer sort of road. The valuelessness of Nantucket land was indicated by its breadth, a full furlong, with a dozen or twenty sets of ruts, between which the grass grew with the luxuriance of things out of place. Far to the south the sea was visible, heaving up and down with the motion of a huge serpent.

"It is the dragon that guards our prison," said Kate.

By two they had reached S'conset, and promptly betook themselves to the beach, which was reached by a precipitous descent from the sand bluff on which the village was situated.

This was a little fishing hamlet with not half a dozen real houses in it, the rest being queer little huts, not much taller than a man, shingled all down the sides, painted every color, especially green, but mostly not at all, of all architectures, but generally reminding one of the little cubbies on ships' decks, and adorned with all sorts of marine

relics and emblems. Evidently, the only idea of a house the builders had was a ship's cabin, a little place to huddle from the storm during the intervals of the watches on deck. Their idea of comfort was to have things ship-shape, and ship-shape these S'conset cabins certainly were.

The surf was magnificent. The waves sweeping across the unbroken breadth of the Atlantic, tripped and fell thunderously at their feet. The hemispherical journey of each one of them represented an achievement of Titanic power that gave a startling impression of the prodigality of force in nature. With such momentum the interminable succession of rollers came on, that the word of God seemed freshly needed to stay each one with its "thus far and no further." The invisible reins of Omnipotence must needs have been upon the necks of these mighty white-maned coursers to curb them at the critical moment.

There in the midst of the foaming battle of sea and land, scores of merry bathers were playing, a sport as reckless in seeming, as safe in reality.

They were as little endangered in this struggle of the contending forces of nature, as grasshoppers on a battle-field.

The Prism sat on the beach, watching the spectacle. After a while Kate said, thoughtfully,

"The sight of those brave waves pouring so steadily on to certain destruction, one after another in endless ranks, merely to wash away a mile or two of land in a century—what an example of self-sacrifice it is. If I were a general, I'd bring my army down on the beach before leading them into battle."

"I believe the inspiration of so much brave dying is half the attraction of the sea shore," said Edgerton.

"And they die so gayly; that's what I like," said Belle, "Your sour heroes I never could fancy. To my notion nothing ought to be gayer than heroism."

"Just look at those waves," cried Edgerton, "never lifting their heads so proudly as when about to be dashed into spray. Surely death is after all

the supreme function of life, its consummate act. And yet in what a shabby, broken spirited, draggletailed fashion, most people die."

"Your extravagant talk has given me a great desire to make the closer acquaintance of those waves," said Anna, "I might say to embrace them, if the personal way in which you have been alluding to them did not make such a suggestion seem almost indelicate. Let's go and get on our dresses, girls."

A little later the young ladies reappeared upon the beach in a metamorphosed condition. Whether Edgerton's company had anything to do with it or not, certainly they all wore very pretty bathing dresses, some of them quite coquettish, and each trimmed according to the prismatic hue which its wearer represented. A more beautiful group of beardless boys was never seen than these disguised maidens appeared to Edgerton, who insisted on fresh introductions all around. Mary Veeder, the ideal of dignified and self possessed carriage in her maidenly weeds, was the most awkward, timid

and self-conscious of them all in this new garb. Liz blushed absurdly. Kate's tall, lithe figure and studied bearing, well became her new attire. Anna was the least changed in general effect, owing to the perfectly unconscious air that she never lost. Belle looked just a merry lad, and Addie, with a green kerchief knotted over her hair and her green trimmed bathing dress, was a perfect naiad. She was dressed more in character, Edgerton told her, than he had ever seen her. She was the only one of the girls who swam and plunged at once into the breakers and struck out into deep water.

The other dripping maidens, Edgerton led, encouraged, held up and picked up, according to the requirements of surf etiquette, and to the accompaniment of enormous fun and the most boisterous laughter. To support five substantial girls at once, against an adult Atlantic breaker, is more than most men are equal to, and often enough the whole line sprawled on their backs upon the sand with the ocean surging over them. Edgerton meanwhile was looking for a chance to leave the

others and strike out to join Addie, who was floating at a couple of waves distance from the shore, and laughing at their tussles with the breakers. All but Kate had finally got enough of it and were standing on the beach, radiant with fun and water, looking, according to Edgerton's assurance, as charmingly bedraggled as a bevy of angels who had sailed through a rain cloud.

A huge wave, which Kate had insisted on waiting for, had just broken over them as she and Edgerton stood hand in hand, when Belle cried out from the shore in a terrified voice,

"See Addie! she's drowning! The undertow has got her!"

CHAPTER IX.

A STRUGGLE AND A VICTORY.

THERE was a chorus of shrieks from the girls, and Edgerton, dashing the water from his eyes, saw Addie full fifty yards away on the landward face of a wave, swimming toward them, but drawn away seaward as if by the feet, much faster than she could swim. The expression of her face, though resolute and unterrified, showed a realization of her peril.

Instantly he sprang forward into the sea, burst through the first breakers, and struck out with all his might toward her. He was a strong swimmer, and as she was swimming against the current and he with it, in twenty strokes he was by her side and passed his arm around her. She was pretty much exhausted, and with a smile that was mostly eyes, stopped swimming and leaned her head on his shoulder, while a great wave broke over them.

The manner of its breaking warned Edgerton that they were drifting seaward. And indeed, now that he had ceased to swim in the same direction, he felt the fatal undercurrent plucking at his feet, and knew that every moment was carrying them further from shore and life. But how could he disturb that dear head from its resting place, and tax again those soft tired limbs! It was with much compunction that he lifted her away from him and said,

"Now, darling, keep hold of me and try to swim. It's our only chance."

She opened her eyes, and, as if rather at his request than with any clear idea of getting to land, began to strike out with one hand, clinging with the other to him. With powerful strokes he now bent his utmost energies to gaining the shore. He felt that he had the strength of a giant. He beat the water into foam. One thought only demoralized him. It was that her hold might slip and he lose her in the waste of waters. But the brave girl was showing the tempered steel of her nerves.

Although long since tired out, she was putting her strength into every stroke. And so they struggled for life during perhaps five minutes. And yet the waves broke over them from behind, and the shore receded. A few moments ago Edgerton could see the horrified expression in the faces of the people on the shore, and now he could only distinguish their figures and a crowd rushing about the beach. In spite of their utmost efforts, they were drifting swiftly out to sea. For a while desperately refusing to entertain the idea, he yielded at last to the irresistible conviction that they were doomed. Their vain struggles only spent their strength the sooner, and to him the five or ten minutes left of life seemed just then of most precious worth.

He turned his eyes from the fast receding shore to the face at his side, with a sense of having with him more than he was leaving over yonder, a richer world than the one they were drifting away from. Ceasing to swim, he began to tread water with just enough vigor to support them.

"There's no use, Addie—we're only drowning the sooner to swim any more," he gasped between the strangling of the breakers.

She seemed perfectly willing to stop. Her look of trust and content was worth death to win, and once won made death intolerable.

*home-
religion*

"The sea and I have fought for you, my darling, but the sea has won you."

"No," she whispered, amid the weltering of the waves, and opening to him the secret seventh heaven of her eyes, "You have won me."

religion In spite of shivering limbs and trembling muscles, her words had power to fill him with a delicious warmth. A man alone may well doubt immortality, but who ever doubted it looking in the face of his love. And especially, how could Edgerton think his day was done, when the sun of his life was just dawning. It could not be that he was to die at daybreak. And yet he did feel very pitiful toward himself, at thought of the sweet earthly happiness such a confession from her lips

would have meant for him had he heard it under other circumstances.

"When we sink, hold me fast," she whispered, "and the sea shall not, after all, come between us."

For the first time then, he pressed the thousand times dreamed of kiss on her cold-blue lips, while his eyes kissed hers, and the angry waves in vain sought to sunder their betrothal embrace.

"Man, ahoy ! where away ?"

They heard nothing. She was seemingly asleep upon his shoulder, and his thoughts were far away, floating in the unearthly dream of a spirit about to be disembodied. Was not this as good a time to give up and sink as any ? His poor legs deserved a rest. It was a pity to tire them any further for nothing. It would be manlier to die voluntarily at the last, while yet he had a little vantage ground of life, than to wait for utter exhaustion. He would bring Death a little gift. Addie was asleep, or maybe dead. He smiled at the thought. It made death seem so warm and

bright. Quick ! he must follow her closely, lest he lose sight of her. And so clasping her tighter and weaving his stiffened fingers together about her, he began to sink.

"Aho-o-y ! man, aho-o-y !"

Great God ! it was a boat !

Ten minutes later, in one of the bathing houses, Mary Veeder was holding Addie's head in her lap, while the other girls were rubbing life into her stiffened limbs, and near by in another hut Edger-ton was fast reviving under the influence of enormous draughts of horrible whiskey.

On going forth he met Belle at the door.

"Do you feel all right again, Frank ?"

"How is Addie ?" were the questions that crossed each other.

"Oh, she isn't much the worse, only chilled and exhausted. But oh, Frank, what an awful thing ! The nasty, nasty sea ! and to think we had been praising it so ! I'll never go into the water again. And to think we were so frightened that I do believe we should have let you drown if

Kate hadn't made the men launch the dory. You owe your life to her."

They found the rest of the party grouped in front of the women's bath-houses, and as the two approached the girls rushed forward, and—well, Anna Coffin led off, and the others followed suit. They just kissed him, every one of them, and *honi soit qui mal y pense*. And he had a realizing sense that he never lost, of how glorious a thing it is to have the genuine, warm friendship of girls, where there is no question of love.

Kate was the last to follow Anna's example, and she wouldn't have done it at all but that a refusal would have attracted attention. She blushed like sunrise as she held her cheek to Edgerton. Belle noticed it and turned away with an expression of pain. She saw how things were going, and her heart ached for her friend.

Addie, who was lying on a shawl in the midst of the group, laughed at the kissing. She was very pale, but there was a gladsome look in her eyes, and Edgerton found there, too, the ratification he

sought of her words when they hung between life and death.

"Miss Mayhew," he said, with strong feeling, "It is to you we owe our rescue."

"Why, I had nothing to do with it," replied Kate in surprise.

"Oh, yes, you did," Belle exclaimed. "If it hadn't been for you, those stupid men would never have thought of launching the dory in time."

"If you hurried them ten seconds you saved our lives, for we were just sinking," said Edgerton.

"Did I, really?" said Kate, with a delighted expression. "Really? Oh Belle, are you sure?"

"There's no doubt about it, Kate, you are responsible for what those two may do for the rest of their lives."

Addie quickly leaned forward, caught Kate's hand and kissed it, and Edgerton did likewise, saying, as if to relieve the slight melodrama,

"I'm just as much obliged to you as if I were worth more."

Kate was a good deal moved, as she said laughingly,

"Girls, who wouldn't go into the life-saving business?"

They resolved to drive home immediately, Edgerton first, however, attending to the purchase of the dory that had saved them, which he ordered to be sent on to Nantucket.

"I've got a hobby about collecting mementoes of my interesting experiences," he explained, "and I mean to take this old dory home for some of my grandchildren to drown themselves out of, and thus compensate things."

The dory was not, however, the only memento of the undertow he meant to carry home with him.

An easy seat was arranged for Addie in the cart, and Edgerton drove home at a rate of speed that astonished the horses and delighted the girls.

"We can't afford to drive so fast as this on the island, as a general rule," said Anna, "we haven't much room to drive in, you see, and have to economize it by going pretty slow."

There was lively talking. Edgerton was required to describe to his sympathetic listeners, each successive phase of his experience in the grasp of the undertow, and his realistic narrative evoked appreciative shudders and bursts of sympathy from the vivacious auditors. His terrible peril had made him a hero, and he had never been so flattered and petted as on that drive home. Addie was too tired and self absorbed, to say more than a word or two during the entire seven mile transit.

CHAPTER X.

MAN MUST WORK.

ON arriving home, Edgerton found a letter from Dr. Brainard. The portion bearing especially on this narrative, ran as follows :

“You haven’t written very regularly of late, and indeed I believe not at all, and my wife, to whom I have read your previous letters, says that you are in love. She is a pretty good judge of such things, and if she has hit it this time I infer that you will soon begin to be interested in the practical question of a salary. Matrimony begins with kisses, but it ends with bread and butter ; the mouth is the alpha and omega of the tender passion. It begins by making idealists of us but ends in making us materialists.

“So if Phœbe is right you may be prepared to take some interest in a little talk I had the other day with Thomas, the publisher of your old paper.

He inquired about you and I told him you were all right again, and he desired me to write and ask you to come back and take your former position. They have made no permanent engagement in your place, and he says the paper can't get along without you. So there is your salary, any time you please to begin drawing it again. Only don't take your old work without some new conditions and restrictions with a view to preserving your nerves from wear and tear. For example — " and here follows a long string of hygienic counsels and theories, at which point we break off.

Now Edgerton was so very much in love that he would have been capable of buying a dory and going into the clam-raking business on the island, for the rest of his life, if he could have persuaded Addie Follet to share his clams with him. But that would certainly not have been his ideal occupation, and this chance to re-enter his old vocation was one of the most opportune events of his entire life.

The peculiar fascination of the journalistic life,

so hard to throw off by those once under its influence, would have made any other profession difficult for him. A flood of pleasant associations and anticipations surged through his mind at the thought of returning again with restored health and invigorated mind to his old place in the office. He had compelled himself for so long a time not to think of his business future, at first on account of his health and later because the thought was unpleasant, that now the old love for the profession and the long repressed ambitions reasserted themselves with such strong and delightful effect as, I fear, for the nonce to take precedence even of the tender passion in his imagination. But still not wholly, for he was conscious of feeling that he might now the more safely return to his work that he carried with him in Addie a sure guarantee against that too close absorption in business cares which had disabled him. In her he should have an always new and fresh world of recreation, relaxation, inspiration.

Edgerton was rather superstitious about luck.

He didn't like to have good luck in indifferent things for fear that by some law of compensation he should be unlucky in important things. But this time his luck had come in the nick of time and in the most important concern of his life.

At about eight o'clock he went to see Addie, not without fear that he should find her the worse for her exposure. But hers was a temperament in which the spiritual part receives the chief impact of all agitating experiences, thereby sparing the frailer body. There was nothing unusual in her appearance beyond a bright flush in the cheeks, and a heightened lustre in the eyes, which were indications of strong emotional excitement rather than of physical disturbance. Usually when he had called he had found her sitting by the window facing the sea; but to-night the curtains of that window were drawn and the chair was moved away. He recognized a significance in the change.

The shadow of death transfigures mortality, and they who by rare chance return from under that shadow, long wear a consecrating aureole. As

these stood looking steadfastly on one another, each plainly saw that aureole on the head of the other, and a mutual reverence mingled with their love.

Their gaze began with an expression of awe, of curiosity and strange new interest, and ended in a long, heartwarm embrace.

"This is so much better than being drowned," said Edgerton emphatically, and her smile was not a contradiction.

Referring to a former speech of hers, he asked maliciously, "Does it seem so peculiar to get married as it did, Addie?"

She flushed, and said,

"No impertinence, sir," and laughed a little.

Shortly after she declared that she could not bear the inside of a house that evening, and they walked out together into the night. He told her of the letter he had just received, and something of his business, with a feeling that the dry details were being turned into poetry by their connection with her. Even his bank account he thought might become a poem by virtue of this philosopher's

stone of love that promised to transmute to gold the whole dull fabric of his life.

"I shall want you very soon," he said. "Will it be hard to leave the island?"

"Not hard any more," she replied. "I shall be afraid in every storm that the sea is coming for me."

They were now upon the beach, and Addie, whose nerves had certainly been somewhat tried that day, appeared strongly agitated by mingled fear and defiance of the water. As Edgerton kissed her, she cried,

"Look, you jealous sea! You would have drowned him. See what you have gained. He is kissing me before you!"

"But we must cross the sea once more. Better not anger it," he said.

"I am not afraid, not with you, for you have beaten it, but I shall never dare to come down here alone again."

Suddenly she exclaimed with a poignant accent, arresting her steps and looking at him with dilated eyes,

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I had forgotten all about it. You won't want me when you know what I've done."

"What is it so bad that you have done?" he asked, soothingly, for he was a little alarmed at her excitement.

"I have broken my pledge! All we girls promised each other that we wouldn't let you make love to us, and I—let me go!" and with a quick motion she disengaged herself from the arm that clasped her waist.

But though taken by surprise, he had not let her escape, and so she stood with her hand in the attitude of pushing away his arm, while she regarded him with a perplexed expression, that meant,

"Don't touch me till I can think!"

But her scruples were not rigid enough wholly to withstand the grieved astonishment of his look, and half resisting, she allowed him to draw her to him, although the averted face and downcast eyes still showed conscience unappeased.

"But what shall I do, what shall I say," she repeated anxiously. "The girls will think me untrue and designing. I can't bear that."

Edgerton, who was disposed to regard the matter as a joke, replied with affected gravity, and a lurking grin,

"Of course not. A solemn pledge of that sort must be kept at all costs. I'll go away and leave you. That'll be the best way out of it."

"Instead of the delightful tightening of her fingers about his arm as a mute detainer, which he had complacently anticipated, she replied with grave decisiveness,

"Yes, I think you had better go."

A cold shudder went all over him. You might have pushed him down with a straw, as he exclaimed hoarsely,

"You're not in earnest, Addie!"

"Who set the example of joking, sir?" she replied with a merry laugh at his consternation, giving him her cheek to kiss for amends.

"Great heavens, Addie, it won't do to fool with

a man's nervous system in that way. I shan't get over this in an hour. To think that you might have meant it! Say, Addie, you couldn't have possibly meant it, could you? Are you not safely mine forever?"

"I can't tell, you must look out, sir," the lips said, but the grey eyes said "evermore."

It is surprising how much snubbing it requires to teach men, that women won't stand anything that looks like taking their love for granted, however lavishly and recklessly, like water, they may themselves choose to pour it out. I don't think Edgerton, who, with many good points, is slightly conceited, understands to this day, just why he got such a sharp set-down.

"I'm afraid it's a bad omen for our love that it should begin in a deceit," said Addie, tristfully.

"Deceit!" exclaimed Edgerton. "It's not a question of deceit. You made an engagement with the girls in perfect good faith, expecting to keep it, but you subsequently ascertained that a prior conflicting engagement had been made in your

behalf by a competent authority, and so of course your engagement with the girls was off."

"I don't understand you," she said, after puzzling a moment.

"Don't you believe that true love matches are made in heaven."

"Of course."

"Well then, our engagement was a prior engagement ordained from eternity."

She smiled, but did not appear convinced.

"Anyhow," he said, "I will see to explaining the matter to the girls. I propose to take all the responsibility on myself, for it belongs to me, and I'm exceedingly proud of it. You, poor little girl, couldn't help being loved. Nobody looking at you, could question for a moment that you were predestinated to that fate."

"No," she insisted, "I must tell them myself, and give them a fair chance to call me names. That is the least amends I can make."

"Well, promise that whatever you do, you won't try to repent of your wickedness."

She promised.

It took him an absurdly long time to say good-bye to her at the gate. So new, so incredibly sweet was she to his lips and his arms, that each kiss, each embrace seemed the very first he had ever taken in all his life, till at last her patience was exhausted, and exclaiming, "You seem to forget that there are more days to come," she ran into the house.

All her womanhood, so long held in abeyance by her mystical passion for the sea, had flowed back upon her that day, thronging her unaccustomed pulses with a host of delirious sensations that made her afraid of herself.

She knew and loved her own beauty, and had often turned at night from her mirror with a sense of self-reverence that was like a prayer. But this night, as the glass reflected a sweet, flushed face and lustrous eyes, richly-framed in unbound hair that fell adown a figure beautifully childlike in its white garb, I fancy she smiled with a superior and calculating complacency at the fair vision, for a

holier thing was born in her heart, to which her beauty was thenceforth but the servant. Happy is that love which when it is born, finds beauty waiting and ready for its service.

As for him, I scarcely need to say that this patient earth, which has borne the spurning of so many a proud heel, never had reason to feel so small and insignificant as beneath the happy, haughty tread of Frank Edgerton walking homeward that night. Homeward do I say? He only was conscious that he was walking toward to-morrow and the endless bright to-morrows.

The next evening there was a meeting of the Prism, and Addie, according to the understanding with Edgerton, was then to make her confession, and he was not to be present. So as twilight fell he lit a cigar and took a long stroll through the quaint town, now viewed by him, not only, like all other objects, through the roseate medium of love, but bathed also in the tender hue of that anticipation of the pensiveness of retrospection which tinges places we are about to leave. He wandered

through the long main street from near the cliff, away down to the water, and threaded again the intricate maze of by-paths and blind allies, doubling deviously among the weather-beaten houses. He strolled through the cemeteries, where the women and children and old men, with an occasional sailor dying a dry death, have found burial under the guarantees of so many different creeds. He sauntered down to the deserted, decaying wharves, stretching forth their ragged arms for ships that shall fill their ample bosoms no more. He inspected the flotilla of sailboats rocking at their moorings. "A fleet of dreams," Addie had called them, and so they looked, with the ocean stretching out beneath the darkening sky, as mysterious as the soul-encompassing ocean of unconsciousness.

He climbed the long stairway up into the belfry of the lofty church tower, and by the waning day and waxing moonlight, overlooked the drowsy little town, the sand-filled harbor, the long lagoon, and desolate Coatue, as barren as the waters it

divides. In zigzag lines of light, hither and thither across the bay, his fancy traced the keel-tracks of the *Dream*, where it had sailed by night and day all that sweet summer. On the headlands afar to the North and East, blazed the light-houses, and his imagination followed out their rays as they went to meet the gaze of distant mariners with messages of welcome or of warning.

The moon silvered as lovingly the desolate sand heaths and sodden moors of the island, as if her far-reaching eye nowhere beheld a fairer gem of the ocean. And round about, encircling all, shone the bright ring of the sea. He had robbed it of a bride. Had he done well to fill with his small self a heart sacred before to so grand a passion? Was not that a more ideal devotion for a human spirit pure and refined enough to cherish it? He could but ask himself these questions, though he would not answer them.

Sweeter thoughts soon drove them from his mind. He fancied himself showing the world to Addie, a world to her so utterly strange and un-

known. What a wealth of wonder, what a host of wide-eyed first impressions, that virgin nature held for him to call out! No miner ever gloated more eagerly over his gold-veined ore than Edgerton over these unwrought capacities in Addie's mind. The world's sights that had grown a stale, old story to him, became again of deep interest as he thought how they would impress his little girl. There comes a time in the lives of men when their own curiosity having become sated and dulled, they thenceforth care only for seeing the wonders of the world through some fresher eyes. And if such dear, fresh eyes can be found, who shall say that the last state of that man is not happier than the first?

Rousing at last from his revery, one of those few reveries in his or any life that end with a smile instead of a sigh, Edgerton descended from the belfry. As he reached home he met Belle at the gate, just returning from the meeting of the Prism. She took his hand and pressed it saying,

"She is a good girl, but oh, Frank, I wish you could have seen with my eyes," with which enigmatical remark she went into the house before him.

CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSION.

ADDIE had made her confession. The young ladies had met at Lizzie Folger's and everybody at once inquired where Edgerton was. No one but Addie knew the reason of his absence, and she volunteered no explanation, thinking no doubt that she had quite enough on her own account to say. The girls had come to depend on Edgerton as an essential element in their social recreation and were decidedly nonplussed at his lack.

"I'm afraid we are getting to rely too much on this young man," said Anna. "It augurs ill for us when he leaves, as I suppose he will do before long."

"It will go hard for a while," said Belle, "but I suppose we shall live to forget him. You can't deny, anyway, girls, that I did you a good turn in dividing him up as fairly as I have done."

"You shall have credit, Belle," said Mary Veeder, "only I'm afraid the effect on us has been rather demoralizing altogether. It isn't wise to get to depending on luxuries that one can't usually command, and gentlemen's society is that sort of a luxury here, you know. I shall never allow myself to be seduced from tea again."

The talk had been carried on entirely by Belle, Anna and Mary, with an occasional word of good-natured acquiescence from Lizzie Folger, who was not much of a talker. Kate and Addie were very silent. Addie often was, but silence had formerly been a rare indulgence on Kate's part. While the girls had been talking she had quietly withdrawn into a window, and was standing with face averted from the others.

Silence had fallen on the group, which was finally broken by Addie with a voice of that peculiar nervous intonation that at once attracts attention as announcing a serious communication.

"You all remember the promise we made, not to let Mr. Edgerton make love to any of us?"

Anna Coffin glanced significantly at Mary Veeder. Kate half turned from the window and looked quickly at Addie. Liz giggled vaguely, and Belle finally said,

"Well, what of it? Who's been flirting?"

"Mr. Edgerton wants me to be his wife and I have said I would," replied Addie, bravely, her cheeks burning brightly, and her eyes on the floor.

Belle glanced at Kate who was staring at the speaker, not angrily but with a lack-lustre eye, and a nervous quiver of the lip. Addie began again :

"Of course I've no excuse. I've just broken my promise and I want you to forgive me. Of course, I'm not sorry. How could I be? but it doesn't seem as if I could ever respect myself again, unless you forgive me."

She stopped speaking and there was a dead silence. After a moment she lifted her eyes and looked around. Kate was still staring at her with no change in her expression, and seemed least likely of all to make any reply. Liz looked uneasy, as

she always did when things took a serious turn. The only face that Addie saw turned on her with a really unpleasant expression was Belle's, and in justice to Belle it must be remembered that her bitterness was wholly on her friend's account. Mary Veeder met Addie's contrite and pleading look with a genial smile of amused good-nature, but it was Anna who first replied in a bantering tone,

"It was naughty, but it was so nice. Poor little Addie! And she was not satisfied with her Edgerton but must have our forgiveness too. What a grasping little thing it is, to be sure! well, it won't do for daughters of Eve to be too hard on each other for plucking forbidden fruit."

"How long has this thing been going on?" asked Belle in a sharper tone than perhaps she meant.

It was the involuntary expression of her sympathy for Kate. She had indeed suspected the state of affairs long before, but she found it more effective in pointing her reproach to treat Addie's confession as a fresh revelation.

"I don't know what you mean by 'this thing,'" replied Addie, with becoming spirit.

"Bless your heart, Belle Macy," said Anna, "where have your eyes been the past month or two? I didn't suppose Addie was telling news to any of us."

"I move," said Mary, "that our forgiveness be formally extended to Addie. All in favor raise their hands."

All hands were raised. Addie exclaimed with an air of great relief and delight,

"Oh, I'm so glad and so thankful. Now he won't be ashamed of me. I'm going to kiss you."

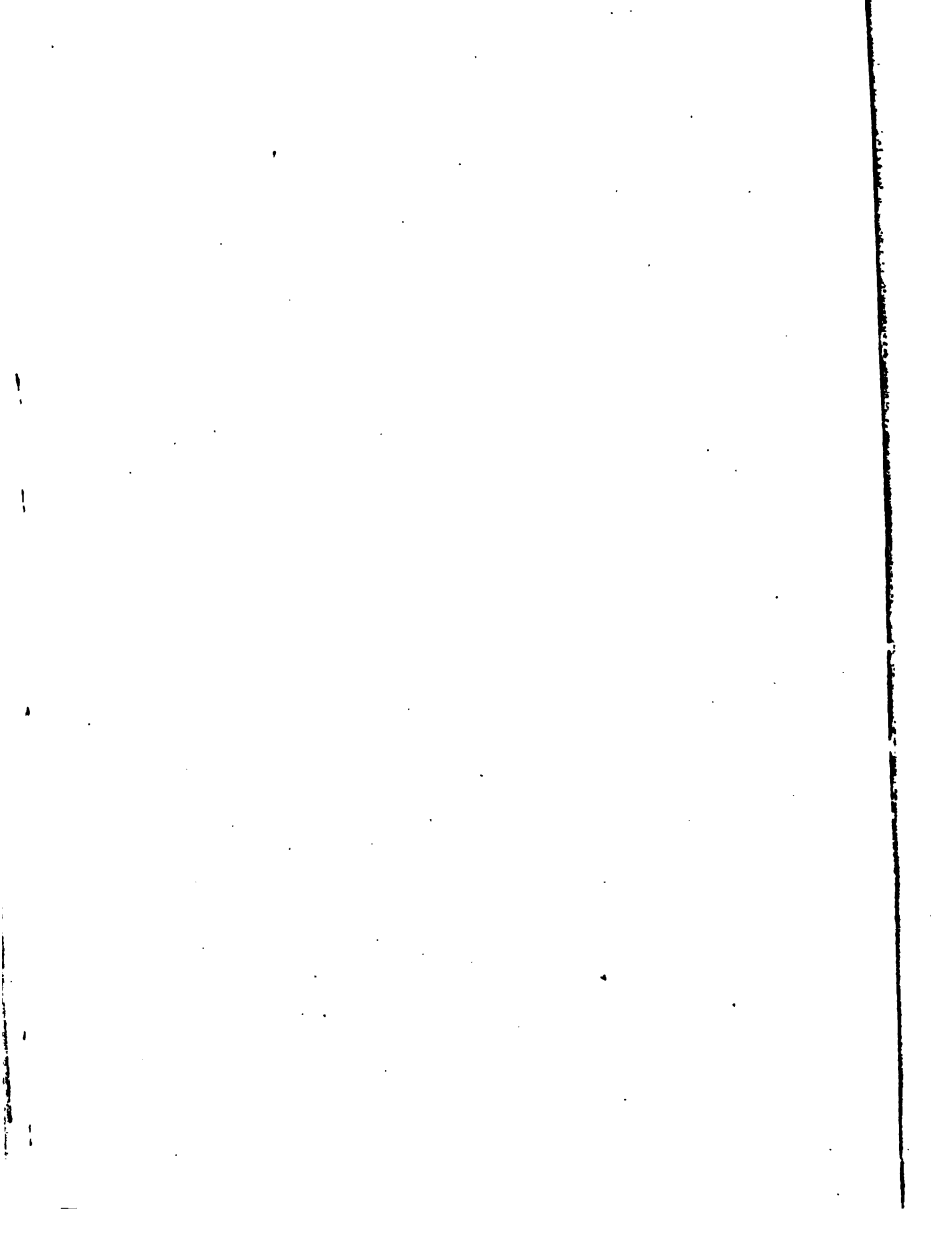
And she began with Belle, who responded rather coldly. Liz always kissed just alike, vigorously, but without special intention. Mary took the girl's cheeks in her hands and kissed her tenderly, in a maidenly motherly way, with a sweet and wholesome kiss that had healing in it. Of all the girls, Mary was the one who liked Addie best, although always entirely undemonstrative about it. Anna kissed her two or three times, impulsively and sympathetically, as one engaged girl kisses another.

Kate was not one of the young ladies who hold their lips cheaper than men do their hands, never counting kisses. When she kissed any one it meant something. As Addie was embracing the other girls, she was bewildered to know what she should do. To kiss her with such bitterness in her heart would be a hypocrisy that would spoil the fragrance of her lips forever more,—not indeed that she cared much for that just now, poor child. To refuse to kiss her would reveal a secret that she would rather die than have dreamed of by her friends. It was cruel, to force such a dilemma upon her at such a moment, when she had enough to bear.

Before she could make up her mind as to her course, Addie turned to her, utterly unsuspecting of the conflict in her bosom, her lips parted in expectancy, her face wet with tears and radiant with happy smiles. As motionless and unresponsive as a statue, Kate received her kiss. But even in that moment she experienced a revulsion of feeling worthy of her noble heart. She loved Edgerton

but the hope of his love had forever vanished. Yet, even as she felt this, a great wave of tenderness for Addie, whom he loved, as for an object dear and precious to him, overwhelmed every thought of resentment or pique, and just as the girl was turning away, disappointed and pained, she was caught in Kate's arms and pressed convulsively to her bosom, while passionate kisses rained on her lips and eyes.

THE END.





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